

REPORTS ON RURAL AMERICA



# Demographic Trends in Rural and Small Town America

KENNETH JOHNSON



BUILDING KNOWLEDGE FOR RURAL AMERICA'S  
FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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# Executive Summary

## An Overview of Demographic Change

***Historically, rural places have lost population. However, since the rural rebound of the 1970s, the story of migration into and out of rural areas has become more complex.***

For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most rural communities experienced population loss as millions of rural residents left for the opportunities in booming cities. The volume of out-migration varied from decade to decade, but the direction of the flows did not. More people consistently left rural areas than came to them. This trend ended in the 1970s when rural population gains exceeded those in urban areas. Gains in rural areas waned in the 1980s, rebounded in the early 1990s and slowed again in the later 1990s. Rural growth picked up again after 2001, although recent gains remain smaller than in the early 1990s. Currently, 17 percent of the population (50 million people) and 75 percent of the land area of the United States is nonmetropolitan.

Some 1,458 nonmetropolitan counties—71 percent of the total—gained population between 1990 and 2000. The gains were widespread in large areas of the Mountain West, the Pacific Northwest, the Upper Great Lakes, the southern Highlands and Piedmont, Florida, and the eastern half of Texas. While such gains slowed in the second half of the 1990s, recent research suggests that growth picked up again after 2001.

By contrast, population losses were common on the Great Plains, where the agricultural economy is employing few workers because of productivity gains, population density is low, natural decrease is common and young adults have been leaving in large numbers for generations.

A variety of factors have contributed to the growth of some rural areas. Technological innovations in communications and transportation have given people and businesses more flexibility to locate in more areas. And the economies of scale and geographic proximity that had long provided a significant competitive advantage to locating in an urban core have been eroded by congestion, high housing costs and densities, land shortages and high labor costs.

More broadly, many Americans prefer to live in smaller places that are near urban area, but not in them. That is borne out by population growth rates in both the 1990s and the post-2000 period for counties that were adjacent to metropol-

itan areas. When no metropolitan center is nearby, counties including “micropolitan” centers with smaller cities are better able to retain population and attract new residents compared with more rural counties.

## Changes in Racial and Ethnic Diversity

***Immigration and racial diversity has increased in rural places, and will likely continue to increase.***

The Hispanic population in nonmetropolitan areas grew at the fastest rate of any racial or ethnic group during the 1990s and the post-2000 period. At the same time, non-Hispanic white growth rates were the lowest of any group and slowed precipitously. While greater than that for whites, the African American growth rate is also quite modest. Racial diversity is growing across rural America, but on a local level rural communities do not show much racial diversity.

Recent research suggests immigration to nonmetropolitan areas is on the upswing and that the immigrants may be dispersing more widely. While immigrants remain a small percentage of the rural population, immigration accounted for a disproportionate share of the nonmetropolitan growth since 1990. Between 2000 and 2004, immigration accounted for 31 percent of the overall population increase in nonmetropolitan areas.

In 297 counties, the foreign-born populations exceeded 5 percent for the first time in 2000. Many of these counties are nonmetropolitan and cluster on the peripheries of existing regions with large concentrations of foreign-born people. There are many isolated counties, especially in the rural Midwest, where the foreign-born population recently exceeded 5 percent. Central North Carolina and northern Georgia have also registered recent gains in the percentages of foreign-born population.

## New Realities

***Farming no longer dominates. Places with high amenities are attracting new migrants into rural areas.***

Though farming remains important in hundreds of rural counties, nonmetropolitan America is now extremely diverse with a population, labor force and economy that encompasses far more than agriculture. Only 6.5 percent of the labor force is engaged in farming, while the proportion of the rural la-

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bor force engaged in manufacturing exceeds that in urban America.

In nonmetropolitan America today, areas with significant natural amenities, recreational opportunities or quality of life advantages have new prospects for growth and development. Many nonmetropolitan areas that are seeing significant population growth benefit from scenic landscapes, mild climates, proximity to rapidly growing metropolitan areas, or a combination of these elements.

These counties that offer recreation, amenity or retirement opportunities have consistently been the fastest growing types of counties in nonmetropolitan America. Such counties grew prominently during the 1970s, 1980s, and the 1990s and growth continued from 2000 to 2004, albeit at a reduced pace.

In certain nonmetropolitan areas, this type of growth has included an accelerating rate of migration among those in their 50s and 60s. This structural shift in migration patterns to recreational counties has significant implications because the ranks of those over the age of 50 are already beginning to swell with the first of 75 million baby boomers. We may be poised to see substantial future population gains in recreational and amenity counties. This would have significant policy implications because many of these areas are already experiencing considerable growth-related environmental and infrastructure stress.

## **Policy Considerations**

***As policymakers consider responses to the issues being faced in nonmetropolitan areas, it is critical that rural constituencies have a seat at the table.***

Rural America is not monolithic, so no single policy can address its varying challenges. Farm policy will continue to be critical to many areas, but agriculture is not the only issue of importance to many rural communities. The challenges confronting nonmetropolitan America will require policymakers to focus on a variety of issues, including:

- The high child poverty rates in rural areas, which are higher than those in urban areas for every racial and ethnic group.
- The poor access in many rural areas to health care facilities and providers, as well as to centers that provide government services.
- The rapid influx of people and businesses into many areas, which creates challenges to education, housing affordability, water quality, transportation, energy and Internet availability.

# Demographic Trends in Rural and Small Town America

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*A Carsey Institute Report on Rural America*



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# Preface

This report summarizes population redistribution trends in the rural and small town communities that are an important part of the social, economic and political fabric of the country. Nonmetropolitan, or rural, America contains over 75 percent of the land area and 17 percent of the U.S. population. What happens in rural America has important policy implications for the fifty million residents who live there and the nation as a whole.

We review population trends by:

- summarizing historical population redistribution trends;
- examining current rural demographic trends using the most recent data available;
- showing how natural population increase (the balance of births and deaths) and migration each contribute to these trends; and,
- documenting the diversity of rural America and demonstrating how demographic trends vary by region, economic type, race/ethnicity and urban proximity;

We then consider the policy implications of these demographic trends.

Some of the demographic changes described in the report are brought to life by recounting the real-world stories of several counties. In addition, reporter Julie Ardery provides a first-hand look at how these changes are playing out in Surry County, North Carolina.

Our purpose here is to provide a non-technical overview of the latest research on rural demographic trends. To accomplish this, the author, Kenneth Johnson, has drawn heavily on his own recent research. He conducted some of this research in collaboration with fine scholars including John Cromartie, Roger Hammer, Daniel Lichter, William O'Hare, Alfred Nucci, Richard Rathge and Paul Voss. We have also included with permission some material from Johnson's publication, "The Rural Rebound," published by the Population Reference Bureau. A recent volume, *Population Change and Rural Society: The Changing Face of Rural America* edited by William Kandell and David Brown, is recommended for additional analysis of these topics. The work presented here has also benefited

from Johnson's long research collaboration with Calvin Beale, senior demographer of the Economic Research Service. Some of Johnson's research summarized here was supported by grants from the North Central Research Station of the USDA Forest Service and by the Economic Research Service of the USDA. We also appreciate Leif Jensen's review of this report and his numerous thoughtful comments.

The Carsey Institute has produced this report for our series, *Reports on Rural America*, with support from the Annie E. Casey and Kellogg Foundations. This report contributes to the Carsey Institute's goals to build awareness and understanding of rural families and communities and contribute to fresh thinking about effective rural policy and programs that invest in those families and communities.



# Introduction

## A New Image of Rural America

Popular images of rural<sup>1</sup> America are often based on outdated stereotypes that equate rural areas with farming. Though farming remains important in hundreds of counties, rural America is now very diverse. The rural population, labor force and economy encompass far more than farming. In fact, only 6.5 percent of the rural labor force is engaged in farming, or roughly half that employed in manufacturing (12.4 percent).

Patterns of population change are surprisingly diverse as well. In the vast rural heartland of the Great Plains, for instance, hundreds of rural farming counties had many more people living in them in 1900 than they do today. In contrast, in areas endowed with natural and recreational amenities or situated near metropolitan areas, sustained population gains strain the social and physical infrastructure of communities.

## Migration Patterns Vital to Understanding Rural Change

As we shall see, population growth or decline stems from a complex interaction between births, deaths and migration over time. For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most rural communities experienced out-migration and population loss as millions of rural residents left for the opportunities in booming cities. The volume of out-migration varied from decade to decade, but the direction of the flows did not. More people consistently left rural areas than came to them.

But this trend ended abruptly in the 1970s with the occurrence of the “rural turnaround.” For the first time, population gains in rural areas actually exceeded those in urban areas during the 1970s. Subsequent trends indicate that the rural turnaround was not an odd fluke, but marked the beginning of a period of oscillation. While gains in rural areas waned in the 1980s, they rebounded in the early 1990’s. Rural population gains slowed again in the later 1990s, but recent research suggests that growth picked up again after 2001, although these recent gains are considerably smaller than those in the early 1990s.

Migration is of particular interest because it can so rapidly alter the size and composition of a population. The impact of natural increase (the excess of births over deaths) on local populations is generally more gradual than migration and garners less attention. Yet, over time natural increase can cause substantial population change. Through most of American history, births exceeded deaths by a substantial margin in rural areas. Recently however, gains from natural increase in many rural communities have sharply diminished or even reversed.

The patterns of demographic change in rural America are often complex and subtle, but their impact is not. We see it in persistent poverty and diminished community capacity in declining rural communities, and in strained infrastructure, pressed institutions, and rising housing costs in growing communities. An in-depth understanding of the current demographic dynamics in rural America will help us to understand these challenges and should inform domestic policy as it impacts rural America.

<sup>1</sup> The terms rural and nonmetropolitan are used interchangeably here as are the terms urban and metropolitan. Please see Appendix A for additional details.

# Historical Demographic Trends

***From the 1920s to the 1960s, people left rural America in substantial numbers, but rural counties still grew slowly due to natural increase. In the 1970s a dramatic and surprising shift occurred when more people moved to rural areas than left.***

A brief review of historical patterns will help us appreciate dramatic differences between current demographic changes in rural America and those of the last 100 years. Through most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, rural areas experienced modest population growth because natural increase was sufficient to offset migration losses. The magnitude of the migration loss varied from decade to decade but the pattern was quite consistent: more people left rural areas than came to them.

In 1920, the population of the United States stood at 106 million (Figure 1). Of these, 35.8 million or 34 percent resided in the 2,052 counties that remain rural to this day. By 2004, this rural population had grown to 49.7 million residents, a gain of 58 percent since 1920. In the same period, the urban population grew much faster—to 248 million, a gain of 253 percent. This fundamental difference underlies many of the demographic trends of the past century.

Three major population redistribution trends contributed to the widespread losses from rural America between 1930 and 1970 (Johnson and Cromartie, 2006). The most important factor was rural to urban migration. As mechanization and capital replaced labor in agriculture, employment opportunities diminished in farm areas and many young people left for the greater economic opportunities in booming cities. Second, within urban areas the burgeoning population sprawled outward from the central city core causing growth in the suburbs that spilled over into rural areas just beyond the metropolitan periphery. Third, the population (both rural and urban) moved from the Northeast and Midwest to the West. Population also flowed out of the South during most of the period, though by the 1960s, the outflow from the South was waning and the migration streams reversed. Rural to urban migration is of the greatest concern here.

Rural America as a whole still grew between 1930 and 1970 because there were more births than there were deaths and people moving away from rural areas (Figure 2). Rural birth rates were higher than in the cities, but most rural counties still lost population because so many people were leaving rural areas. The total rural population still grew because the minority of counties that did grow gained a substantial amount of population. Migration losses were greatest during the 1950s and smallest during the Depression of the 1930s. In all, millions of people moved out of rural areas between 1930 and 1970.

Surprisingly, this trend ended abruptly in the early 1970s. Demographer Calvin Beale (1975) of the US Department of Agriculture was the first to identify this “rural turnaround.” In all, more than 80 percent of the counties then defined as rural gained population in the 1970s. In fact, the rural population growth was so great that it actually exceeded growth in metropolitan areas—an occurrence virtually without precedent in the nation’s history. Even more surprising was the source of the growth. Traditionally when the rural population grew, it had been because births exceeded deaths plus net out-migration. But the rural turnaround of the 1970s was fueled primarily by people moving into rural counties from American cities. Figure 2 shows how dramatic this was. In all, some 2.5 million more people moved from metropolitan areas to rural areas than moved in the opposite direction.

While demographers struggled to explain the turnaround, trends were shifting again, as Figure 3 shows. By the late 1970s, growth in rural America was lagging and this slowdown became more pronounced in the 1980s. Between 1980 and 1990, the number of rural counties gaining population sharply declined and overall rural population gains slowed. More importantly, the substantial net influx of migrants that fueled the turnaround stopped in the 1980s. As the 1980s came to an end, demographers were left with a complicated puzzle to figure out. Was the turnaround a fluke? Figure 3 demonstrates that the trends of the 1980s were neither a repeat of the turnaround nor a return to historical trends. But, the question was very much in doubt as the first post-census data of the 1990s were released and demographers realized that rural demographic trends had changed direction once again.

FIGURE 1. POPULATION TRENDS IN METROPOLITAN AND NONMETROPOLITAN AREAS, 1920–2004.

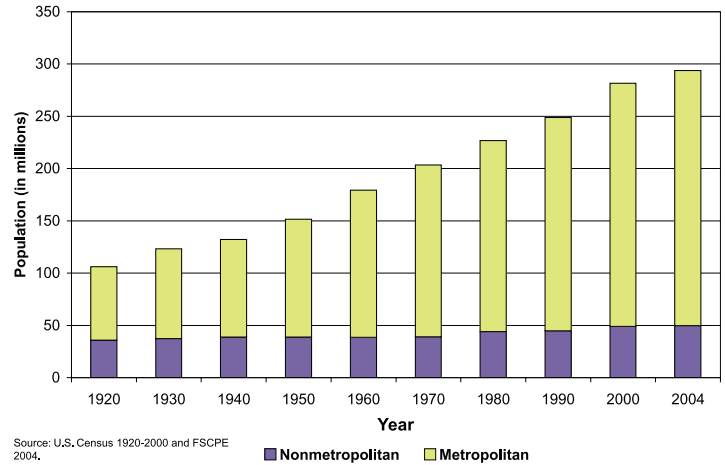


FIGURE 2. NONMETROPOLITAN DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE 1930 TO 2004.

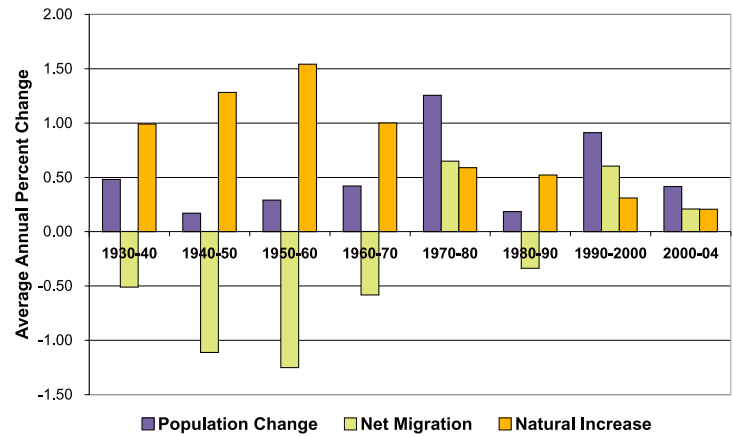
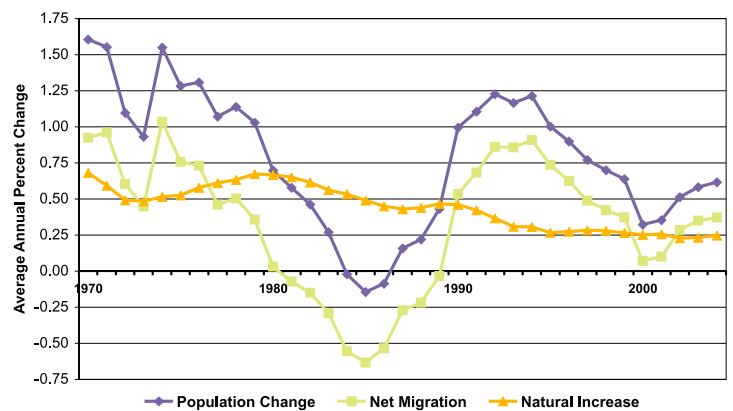


FIGURE 3. NONMETROPOLITAN DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS, 1970 TO 2004.



# Rural Demographic Trends Since 1990

*After out migration and slow growth in the 1980s, renewed migration gains fueled greater rural growth in the 1990's.*

In the 1990s a “rural rebound” began to take shape consisting of substantial net migration gains supplemented by modest natural increase, much as had happened in the turnaround of the 1970s. By April 2000, the rural population was 48.8 million, a gain of 4.1 million since 1990, or a little under 1% per year (Figure 4). Almost 71 percent of the rural counties gained population between 1990 and 2000. Nearly two thirds of this population gain, 2.7 million people, was due to migration. The rural population still grew at a slower pace than did the metropolitan population, but the gap was much narrower than during the 1980s.

Rural population and migration gains began to diminish in the late 1990s and the slowdown continued in the first years of the new century (Johnson, Nucci and Long, 2006). Both net migration and the rate of natural increase slowed dramatically in the late 1990s with only a modest recovery in migration recently.

## Migration is now the engine of demographic change in rural areas.

If we are to understand the demographic changes underway in rural America, we need to consider the patterns of migration change in some detail across time and age.

Historically, population growth or decline in rural areas has depended on the balance between net migration and natural increase. Until the remarkable rural turnaround of the 1970s, rural areas consistently lost migrants to urban areas. The volume of net migration varied but the direction never changed: people left rural America. Natural increase was always sufficient to offset this migration loss, so rural areas experienced slow growth overall. Gains from natural increase peaked during the postwar baby boom (1946–1964) and were sufficient to offset even the substantial migration loss of the period. Recently gains from natural increase have diminished (for reasons we shall consider shortly), leaving migration to dominate rural demographic patterns.

Migration's prominent role in fueling rural population growth is clearly reflected in data for the past several decades. In the rural turnaround of the 1970s, migration produced the bulk of the rural population gain. The gain from net migration in rural areas actually exceeded that in metropolitan areas during the 1970s—an extremely rare occurrence. During the 1980s, migration losses were barely offset by natural increase. Migration fueled the rural rebound of the 1990s as well. The rural net migration gain in the 1990s (.6 percent annually) was nearly as great as that in metropolitan

### SHORT-LIVED REBOUND IN THE HEARTLAND

Missouri's Mercer and Sullivan counties illustrated the extent of the rural rebound of the 1990s. They adjoin one another near the Iowa border in the southern Corn Belt where, because of poor soil and sloping terrain that promotes soil erosion, farm productivity lags behind the best Midwestern farming areas. Neither county is near a metropolitan area with 50,000 or more residents, nor part of a micropolitan center with 10,000 or more.<sup>2</sup> Nor is either county a recreational, amenity or retirement county. These two counties have never generated enough wealth to sustain a strong local economy. The result has been an extraordinarily prolonged population decline. Mercer County's population peaked at 14,700 in 1900 and then fell to only 3,700 in 1990. Sullivan County's population went from 20,282 in 1900 to 6,300 in 1990.

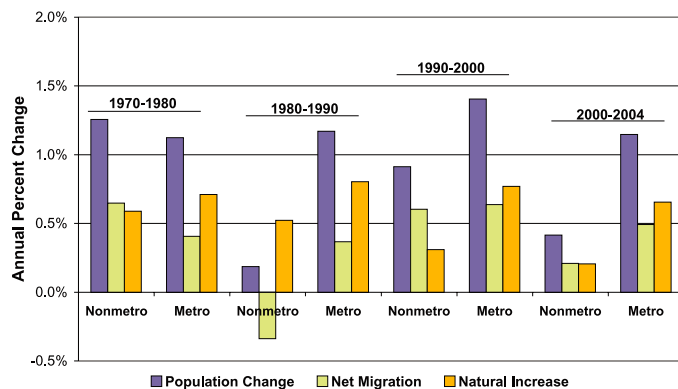
Then, in the early 1990s, an entrepreneurial firm from the area opened a large new hog-raising and pork-processing business. The firm located its headquarters in Mercer County, with a packing plant in Sullivan County. Attracted by the new plant, the area's population grew. By 2000, Sullivan County's population increased by 14.1 percent. Migration fueled the entire population gain, even offsetting natural decrease. In Mercer County, the

population gain was smaller at .9 percent, but the county gained 5.6 percent from net migration. This was enough to offset substantial natural decrease and give the county its first population gain since 1910.

The population rebound in Sullivan and Mercer counties was short-lived. Each county has experienced out-migration and population decline according to the most recent Census Bureau estimates. Sullivan's population had dropped by 3.9 percent by July 2004. The loss was due to a net migration loss of 4.4 percent. Mercer County lost 3.7 percent of its population between 2000 and 2004. Most of the loss was because of out-migration (-3.4 percent), but Mercer also experienced natural decrease, just as it has since at least 1970. Sullivan and Mercer join 505 other rural counties, which have lost population since 2000 after growing in the 1990s.

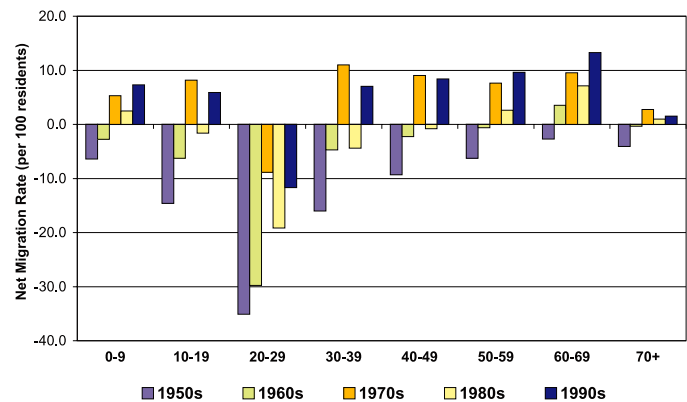
<sup>2</sup> Micropolitan areas are counties that contain a town of at least 10,000 but fewer than 50,000 residents. See Appendix A for a detailed discussion of metropolitan, micropolitan and nonmetropolitan counties.

FIGURE 4. POPULATION CHANGE IN METROPOLITAN AND NONMETROPOLITAN AMERICA, 1970–2004



Source: U.S. Census 1970-2000 and FSCPE 2004.

FIGURE 5. NONMETROPOLITAN AGE SPECIFIC NET MIGRATION



Source: Johnson et al., 2005.

areas (.64 percent annually). Since 2000, however, migration gains in rural areas have diminished again. With natural increase now so minimal, the recent reduction in net migration dramatically slowed overall population growth.

Over the past several decades, urban and rural areas showed very different patterns of growth. Migration gains in metropolitan areas have been less volatile than those in rural areas (Figure 4). Most metropolitan migration gains now come from immigration, which has been considerable over the past several decades. In contrast, most of the rural migration gain results from domestic migration with more people moving from cities to rural areas than vice versa. However, as we shall see, immigration from foreign countries to rural areas is also on the rise.

### People in their 20s leave; older people come to rural America

Net migration to and from rural areas has always been age selective (Fuguitt and Heaton, 1995; Johnson and Fuguitt, 2000; Johnson et al., 2005). In virtually every migration stream, the incidence of migration is highest for young adults. This flow has traditionally been from rural to urban areas, with young adults most likely to be attracted to a metro area's social and economic advantages, especially given the diminishing demand for labor in farming and mining and low wages in many rural industries. While the magnitude of migration has varied, there is striking consistency over the years in overall age-specific migration patterns. In each decade from 1950 to 2000, rural counties experienced a significant outflow of young adults ages 20 to 29 (Figure 5). This loss was greatest during the 1950s and 1960s, when the rural exodus was still underway. Young adult losses moderated considerably during

the turnaround of the 1970s and again during the rural rebound of the 1990s. For those in their 30s and 40s, net migration losses moderated (1950s, 1960s, 1980s) or were replaced by population gains (1970s, 1990s). Among those over the age of 50, rural counties received a net influx in all but the 1950s, with the rate generally increasing through time.

In general, the 1990s and 1970s show considerably larger migration gains (or smaller losses) for virtually every age group when compared to the other three decades. The significant difference between age specific migration trends in the 1970s and those in earlier decades supported the argument that the rural turnaround of the 1970s represented a significant break from prior rural demographic trends (Johnson and Fuguitt, 2000). Recent research using new estimates for the 1990s documented for the first time that the age specific migration trends of the 1990s closely approximate the trends of the 1970s (Johnson et al., 2005). The trends of the 1990s are generally more moderate than those of the 1970s among those under the age of 40. However, at older ages the migration gains in rural areas were generally greater than in any previous decade. As we shall see, the accelerated influx of those over the age of 50 has important implications for the future of rural areas, because it includes the 75 million strong post-war baby boom. The cumulative impact of these age specific net migration trends has important implications for natural increase as well.

## **After decades of youth out-migration, the number of rural births has now declined.**

Since net migration has come to dominate the population redistribution trends in rural America, it is easy to overlook natural increase. In contrast to net migration, which can rapidly transform the size and structure of a population, the impact of natural increase is subtle and gradual. For example, when a young adult migrates, the loss is immediately reflected as a net migration loss of one person. However, the longer-term impact for the area is that the loss of the migrant diminishes future population gains from the children of the departed migrant. Over the course of several generations, the impact of out-migration of people of childbearing age on natural increase can be substantial. The minimal natural increase in rural counties since 1990 reflects just such a culmination of decades of young adult out-migration. These migration trends have now produced an age structure in many rural counties that includes few young adults of childbearing age and many older adults at greater risk of mortality.

High rural fertility also historically contributed to the greater levels of natural increase. Farm families and small-town residents had more children than their urban counterparts, and enough babies were born to offset the steady departure of working-age people. But over the last two decades, rural women have been bearing fewer children. They still marry earlier and have children earlier than their urban counterparts (though even these differences are diminishing), but fertility levels among the two groups are now virtually indistinguishable (Long and Nucci, 1998; Heaton, Lichter and Amoateng, 1989).

The overall effect of these factors on natural increase is clearly evident in the population trends. The gain from natural increase in rural areas after 2000 continued to diminish and is considerably lower than it was during the 1970s and 1980s (see Figure 3). Since 1990, many more counties actually experience natural decrease, where deaths in a county exceed births. This is the ultimate demographic consequence of decades of young people leaving and older people either aging in place or migrating into selected parts of rural America. The variability in age-specific migration patterns is only one of many dimensions along which diversity is evident in non-metropolitan areas.



# The Diversity of Rural America

## *Rural America's diversity is reflected in recent demographic trends*

To this point we have focused on overall demographic trends, but rural America is a deceptively simple term for a remarkably diverse collection of places. And that diversity exists along a number of different dimensions. Geographically, it encompasses the vast agricultural heartland of the Great Plains sprawling from the Canadian border deep into Texas; the arid range of the Southwest; the deep, mountainous forests of the Pacific Northwest; the hardscrabble towns and hollows of the Appalachians; the rocky shorelines and working forests of New England; and the flat and humid coastal plain of the Southeast. Economically, it includes auto supplier plants strung like pearls on a chain along the expressways forming the backbone of the auto corridor through Michigan, Indiana, Ohio and Kentucky and Tennessee; warehouses and distribution centers clustered around major interstate interchanges; the farm towns of the corn and wheat belts; as well as sprawling recreational areas near mountains and inland lakes and along the Atlantic, Pacific and Great Lakes coastlines. Racial and ethnic diversity is evident as well. While much of rural America remains overwhelmingly white, there are substantial African-American concentrations in the Southeast, Hispanic areas of long-standing in the Southwest and significant numbers of Native Americans in the northern Great Plains and upper Great Lakes. In addition, a surprising number of recent immigrants are settling in rural areas. We next turn our attention to how demographic trends differ by geography, economic activity and race and ethnicity.

### Regional Diversity

#### ***Minimal population growth in the Midwest and Great Plains, larger gains in the West and South***

Regional data from 1990 and 2004 provide the first hint of the geographic diversity in demographic trends. Rural population growth rates diminished in all regions of the country over the period. The differences were extremely modest in the Northeast, but the Midwest saw the most dramatic decline from modest population gains in the 1990s to minimal gains 2000–2004 (Figure 6). In the South and West, population gains were considerably larger, but still diminished from the levels of the 1990s.

A careful look at the geographic distribution of population gain and decline since 1990 underscores the pervasiveness of the rural rebound and the geographic unevenness of popu-

lation redistribution since 2000. Rebound counties include those labeled gain-gain and gain-loss (Figure 7). Some 1,458 counties gained population between 1990 and 2000. This represents 71 percent of the rural total. Rural population gains were widespread in large areas of the Mountain West, the Pacific Northwest, the Upper Great Lakes, the southern Highlands and Piedmont, Florida and the eastern half of Texas. As we shall see, many rural counties located in these areas benefit from scenic landscapes, mild climates, proximity to rapidly growing metropolitan areas, or a combination of these elements. In contrast, population losses were common on the Great Plains where a continuing reliance on farming minimizes employment opportunities, population density is low, natural decrease is common and young adults have been leaving in large numbers for generations (Johnson and Rathge, 2006). Since 2000, 507 of the counties that rebounded in the 1990s began to lose population again, while only 61 counties previously losing population began to gain population again. Thus, fewer than half of all rural counties gained population from 2000 to 2004. A careful analysis of these gain-loss counties suggests that the slowdown in rural growth is evident in most parts of the country.

With migration now the major factor in rural population growth, it is not surprising that there is considerable overlap between the geographic patterns of population change in Figure 7 and the patterns of net migration in Figure 8. Net migration gains occurred in 65 percent of the rural counties during the rebound of the 1990s. Such gains were common near met-

FIGURE 6. POPULATION CHANGE BY U.S. REGION, 1990–2004

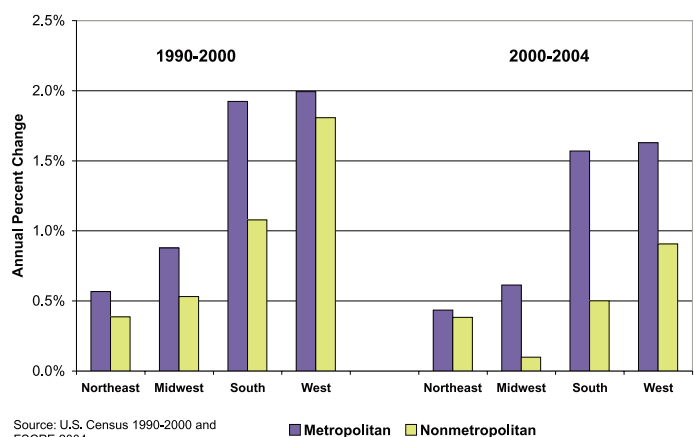


FIGURE 7. NONMETROPOLITAN POPULATION CHANGE, 1990–2000, 2000–2004

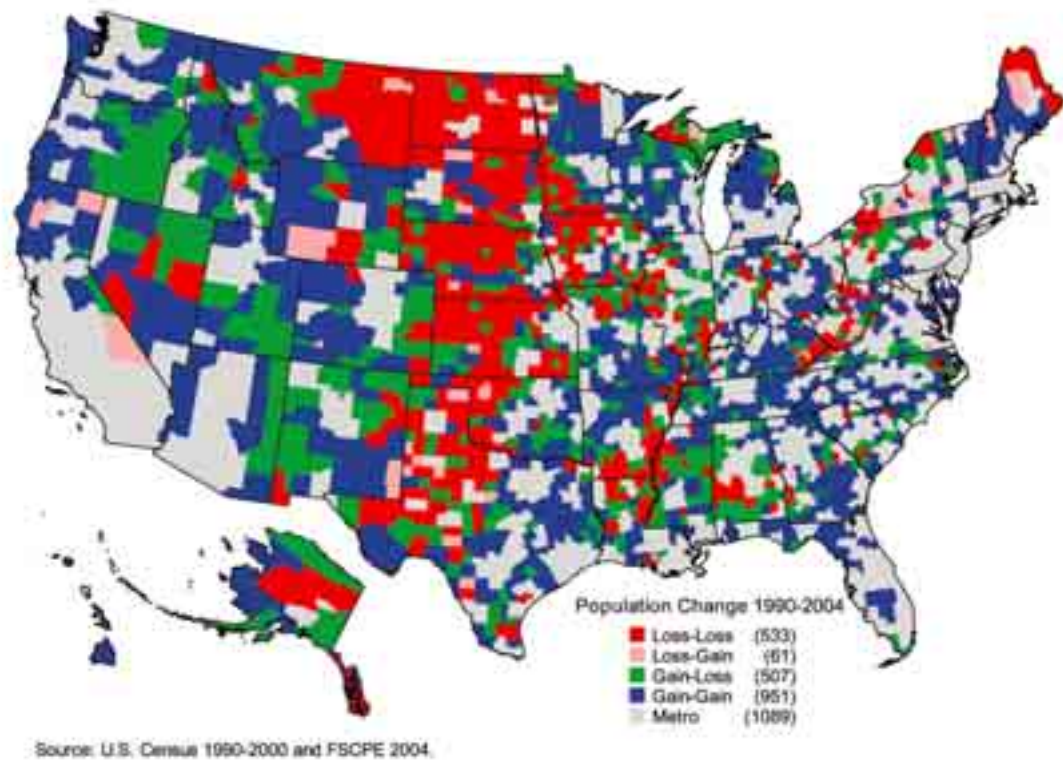
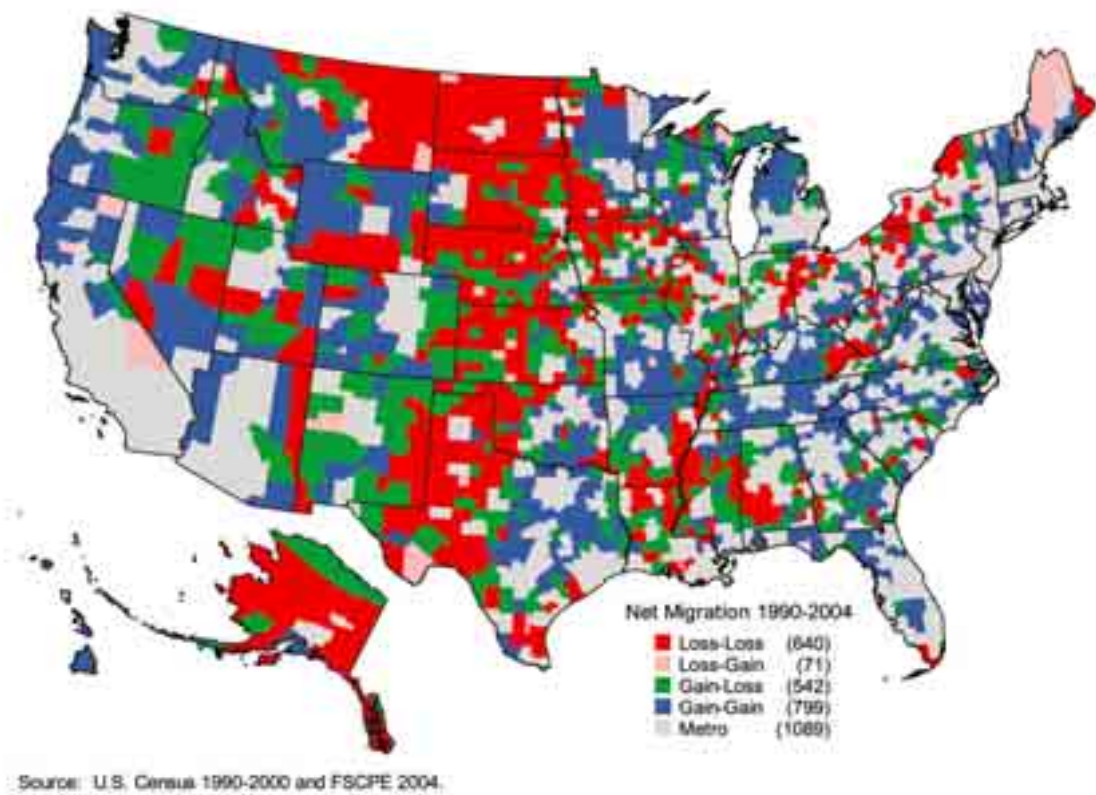


FIGURE 8. NONMETROPOLITAN NET MIGRATION, 1990–2000, 2000–2004





## CONTINUING A DOWNWARD SPIRAL

Some rural counties were never touched by the rural rebound of the 1990s. Among these were hundreds of Great Plains agricultural counties including Jewell County, Kansas. Straddling the boundary between the Corn Belt and the Wheat Belt, with a large proportion of its labor force engaged in farming, Jewell is a classic Great Plains farming county. Farmers grow wheat, sorghum, corn, and soybeans. Raising cattle is also an important part of the local economy. Jewell is far removed from the urban scene, the nearest metropolitan area is nearly 100 miles away and not even a micropolitan area is nearby.

Jewell's population peaked in 1900 at 19,420, growing from just 207 only 30 years earlier. But the population has declined ever since, and by 1990 only 4,251 people remained in the county,

some 22 percent of the 1900 total. Jewell's population was down by another 10.8 percent to 3,791 by 2000. The county has few young adults and many seniors. Some 31 percent of Jewell's population is over 65, more than twice the percentage in the United States. In contrast, only 23.8 percent of the population is under 20. As a result, Jewell County has had more deaths than births in 30 of the last 33 years.

If anything, the situation has worsened since 2000. The Census Bureau estimates that Jewell County already lost another 9.7 percent of its population by 2004. The loss comes from both substantial out migration, which in the last four years has already exceeded the loss registered during all of the 1990s, and natural decrease, which also appears to be accelerating.

ropolitan centers, in the upper Great Lakes and Southeast; and in much of the West. Out migration was evident in the Great Plains, Mississippi Delta, in parts of the Appalachians and in the older industrial belt of the Northeast and East North Central region. After 2000, the number of rural counties with net migration gains diminished sharply to 42 percent. Counties shifting from in-migration to net out-migration were quite common in many parts of the country including the Midwest, Mountain West and parts of the Southeast.

### *The incidence of natural decrease in American counties is now higher than at any point in history.*

Figure 9 maps natural increase on a county by county basis in rural America over the same period. The critical point here is that over 40 percent of America's rural counties have experienced natural decrease since 2000. These 850 counties were concentrated in agricultural regions of the Great Plains and Corn Belt, in parts of the Upper Great lakes and in parts of the Ozarks and Appalachia. Natural decrease is rarely an isolated

FIGURE 9. NONMETROPOLITAN NATURAL INCREASE, 1990–2000, 2000–2004

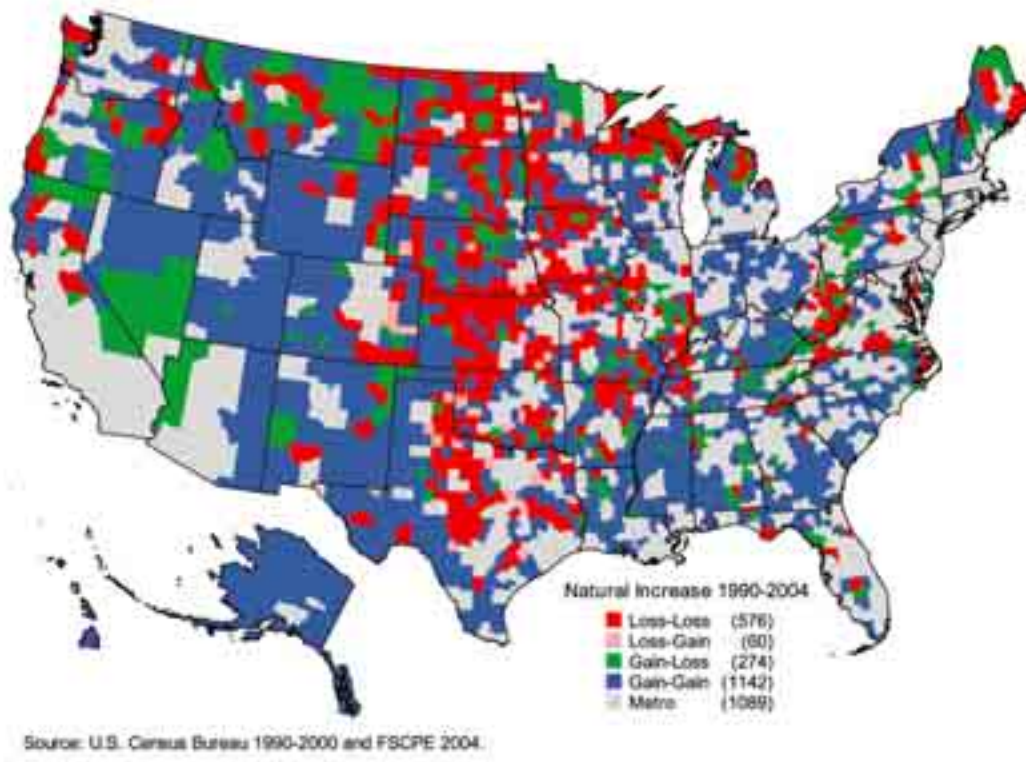
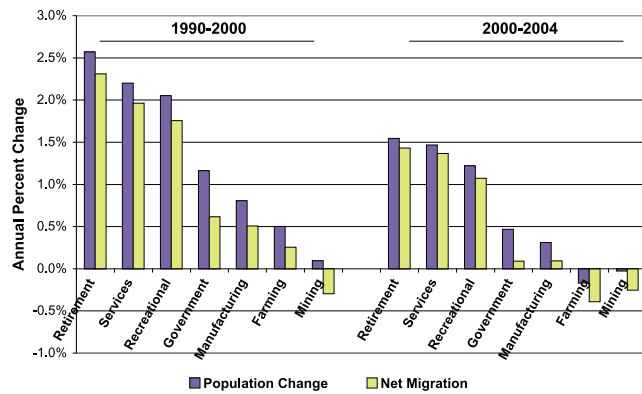


FIGURE 10. DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE BY COUNTY TYPE 1990–2004



Source: U.S. Census 1990-2000, FSCPE 2004, and USDA Economic Research Service 2004.

occurrence, so many of these counties have long histories of births exceeding deaths. Because most counties with natural decrease are also experiencing net outmigration, the prospects for future population gains are limited at best.

### Economic Diversity

#### *Some traditional industries remain but rural economies have become surprisingly diverse*

Rural America was originally settled by people whose livelihoods depended upon their ability to wrestle food, fiber, and minerals from the land. But now the rural economic base is quite diverse. Farming still dominates some parts of rural America, but not in terms of employment or new job creation. Less than 6.5 percent of the nonmetropolitan labor force is engaged in farming. As the dependence on agriculture and other extractive industries has waned, other activities such as retailing, services and manufacturing have come to dominate the economic and employment structure in rural areas. To

help understand the diverse rural economy, the Economic Research Service has produced a typology that groups rural counties based on the dominant characteristics of the local economy (Economic Research Service, 2004). Figure 10 gives an overview of population trends for pertinent county types. From figure 10, it is evident that the magnitude of population gain (or loss) is influenced by the dominant economic activity in a county. Large population gains fueled by migration occurred in counties where retirement, services and recreation dominated, but in counties where farming and mining were the most significant factors, minimal population gains or outright population loss was occurring. It highlights the remarkable economic diversity of nonmetropolitan America and underscores the linkage between economic activity and demographic change.

Though the days when farming and mining monopolized the rural economy are long past, these industries remain important elements of the local economy and psyche in vast stretches of rural America. Figure 11 shows the farming, mining and manufacturing counties in rural America. Farming still dominates the local economy of some 403 rural counties. Mining (which includes oil and gas extraction) is a major force in another 113. These two types of counties represent the most traditional segment of rural America. They have a long history of slow population growth or outright decline and many have experienced significant net out migration for decades (Johnson 1989; Fuguitt and Heaton 1995; Johnson and Fuguitt 2000). They continue to shed jobs and consolidate despite more than a century of adjustment in which capital and technology replaced labor. As a group, they were the least likely to gain population during the 1990s (Figure 12). Since 2000, out migration from farming and mining counties has accelerated and population losses are now widespread. In

### CONTINUING GROWTH IN THE ROCKIES

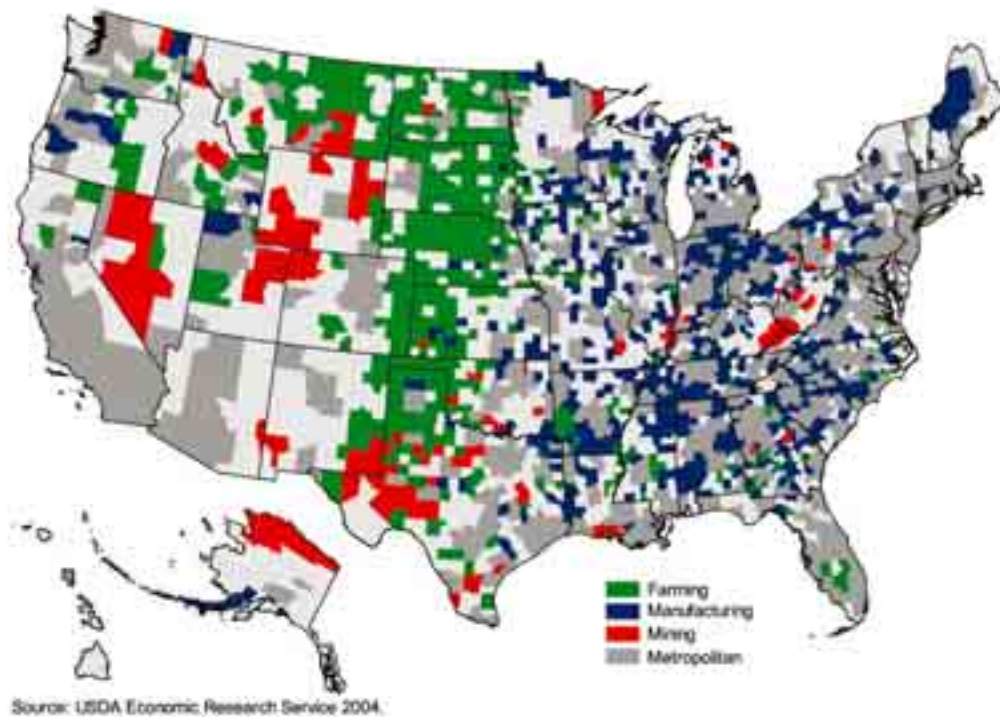
Chaffee County, Colorado is set in the Arkansas River valley, heavily forested and flanked by the high peaks of the Rockies. The county suffered during the 1980s when a large molybdenum mine shut down (the metal is used in the fabrication of high tech alloys for military aircraft and other products). As a result, it experienced significant out-migration and population loss during the 1980s. Chaffee is not adjacent to a metropolitan area nor does it contain a micropolitan center, but it does have several things going for it. It ranks high on the amenity scale, offers recreational opportunities and is also a retirement destination.

From 1990 to 2000, its population grew by 28 percent fueled by a 29 percent net migration gain. This gain was thanks largely to the arrival of newcomers fleeing growing congestion and dense settlement in Denver and elsewhere in the Front Range.

The county also attracted employees who worked in the nearby resort towns of Vail and Breckenridge but who couldn't afford to live there. Some of the more affluent Chaffee newcomers have launched new businesses or bought out older proprietors. A number of small-scale manufacturing plants have sprouted up: a toolmaker, a manufacturer of archery equipment, and an assembler of first aid kits. Motels, restaurants, and recreation provide jobs and attract visitors.

Since 2000, Chaffee County has continued to gain population, though at a far less torrid pace than during the 1990s. The overall population gain of 4.3 percent between 2000 and 2004 was fueled entirely by migration. Given its natural amenities and the proximity of major recreational areas, continued growth is likely for the county.

FIGURE 11. NONMETROPOLITAN FARMING, MANUFACTURING, AND MINING COUNTIES

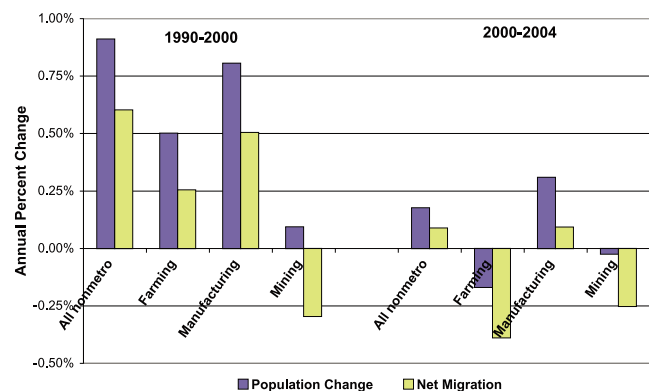


fact, some 77 percent of farming counties and 62 percent of mining counties lost population between 2000 and 2004. In many farming counties, so few young adults now remain that births to their depleted numbers no longer offset deaths.

#### *Manufacturing growth is now in doubt*

It does not appear that manufacturing will come to the rescue. The proportion of the rural labor force employed in manufacturing in 2003 was 12.4 percent, substantially higher than the 8.4 percent figure in metropolitan areas. The roster of rural industries is varied, including clothing manufacturers, auto-parts makers, and manufacturers of computer equipment. Many manufacturing counties enjoyed significant population and migration gains in the 1990s, after little growth in the 1980s. However, the recent globalization of manufacturing has cost many rural manufacturing jobs. The low technology, low wage manufacturing that rural manufacturing plants specialized in is now shifting offshore. The impact of these trends is clearly reflected in the dramatically reduced levels of population growth and modest net migration gains in manufacturing counties since 2000 (Johnson and Cromartie, 2006).

FIGURE 12. DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE 1990–2004 FOR FARMING, MANUFACTURING, AND MINING COUNTIES



Source: U.S. Census 1990-2000, FSCPE 2004, and USDA Economic Research Service 2004.

# Mayberry Shake-Up

## *Economic and Ethnic Change Comes to Surry County, North Carolina*

BY JULIE ARDERY

Old-timers and newcomers alike say they enjoy “the quiet” of Surry County, North Carolina. American flags rustle along Main Street of Mt. Airy (pop. 8400), the county’s commercial hub. Andy Griffith was born here, and with only occasional hints of embarrassment, the myth of “Mayberry” hangs heavy: there are statues of the actor and fictional son “Opie” toting fishing poles, “Aunt Bea’s” barbecue restaurant shaped like a barn, “the Goober” (a specialty drink at the local coffee-house), and “Floyd’s Barber Shop” replicated in a storefront right downtown.

Local merchants may be trading on nostalgia, but Surry County is experiencing very real upheaval, changes as great as at anytime in its history. For a century the county’s economy, society and culture have been bound up in three industries—furniture making, tobacco, and textiles. Suddenly, all three are passing from the scene.

Joanna Radford, field crops specialist for the Surry County Extension Service, reports that “1997 was the last good year” for area tobacco growers. Prices for flu-cured tobacco are down while fuel and fertilizers are costlier than ever. In other times, farmers would have squeezed through, but the industry, after struggling for a decade, was effectively retired last year. The Fair and Equitable Tobacco Reform Act of October 2004 ended tobacco price supports and other programs controlling supply. Radford says Surry growers “had been hanging on,” as the federal government continued to trim back allotments. Now the 10-year payout to farm owners and growers is a reality. She estimates there were only twenty growers in the county in 2005; half of those have said they won’t plant tobacco next year.

Located on the Virginia line, twenty-five miles north of Winston-Salem, Surry County has been known also for furniture production since the 1920s. Bassett, its last remaining furniture plant, announced in November 2005 that it would close by year’s end. Surry’s furniture factories have gone the way of the industry as a whole in North Carolina. Except for the making of simple cabinets, work that’s heavily mechanized, production has moved overseas to China and Vietnam. The big inter-

national furniture show, held for eight decades in nearby High Point, NC, will take place next year in Las Vegas.

Likewise, most of Surry County’s textile companies have moved abroad or closed entirely. The few remaining plants—like Kentucky Derby Hosiery—are sock-manufacturers, this end of the business being highly mechanized. More labor-intensive textile manufacturing has followed cheaper labor to Mexico, Brazil and Costa Rica.

“The biggest shock of my life came” last spring, says Brent Hutchens, age 48. “They told us one day they were going to be shutting the doors, and that changed my life.” A native of the tiny Copeland community, Hutchens lost his job with Intex, a fabric printing company in Pilot Mountain. He had been hired there in 1980 earning \$2.99 an hour. Over 24 years he advanced to “lead man,” making \$12 an hour mixing dyes, overseeing printing, and working with customers. “I really liked my job,” Hutchens said. “We’d worked many a seven-day week. I never thought it would happen to us. But it did.”

The Intex closing in March 2004 laid off about 200 workers. Some found jobs at a sock factory in neighboring Yadkin County. Others remain unemployed. And some, like Hutchens, chose to return to school, with help from a federal workforce program. To afford school, Hutchens “sold eighteen cows” and took out a consolidation loan to lower his mortgage. He enrolled in Surry Community College’s Livestock and Poultry Technology program. After finishing a curriculum of animal science, computers, and business, he plans to graduate in May and hopes then to be hired as a poultry inspector by a chicken processing company in the Surry County seat, Dobson.

Wayne Farms, one of the county’s largest employers, operates a hatchery and feed mill in Elkin and a major plant in Dobson, where it processes 650,000 birds each week. As the county’s tobacco, furniture and textiles vanish, Wayne Farms has grown, adding 200 workers last year. According to HR director Karen Hardy, 80–85% of the company’s work force is Hispanic. Many employees live in a trailer park adjacent to the chicken plant and walk to work.

Hispanic residents now outnumber African-Americans in Surry County. And their presence is especially strong in the Dobson-area schools. Assistant Superintendent Billy Sawyers of the Surry County School District says now, “One in every four students is Hispanic. Ten years ago, we didn’t have four.”

The principal of Dobson Elementary, Jan Varney, reports “an explosion.” Since 1996 her school’s population has grown 23% (from 550 to 680 students). Hispanic enrollment is more than 500% higher (40 Hispanic students in 1996, 227 this year). Beginning around 1993, Varney says, “Every time you blinked your eyes, ten Hispanic children would be here at the school to enroll.” To relieve what had become a year-round job of registration, the district opened an intake center in Dobson in 2002, where all students new to the district are tested and enrolled in school.

Varney has made “training in cultural matters” a priority for both staff and parents. Mexican-born parents, she says, typically expect the schoolteachers to assume full responsibility for their children’s education, a premise she is trying to change. A Hispanic PTO meets 2–3 times a year. At one “Hispanic night” in November, 45 parents studied pre-reading exercises and were sent home with bilingual books to study with their children.

Fiscally, Varney’s strategy has been to concentrate dollars on K–2 and focus on teaching everyone to read by second grade. Her philosophy: “If I can teach you to read, you’ll succeed.” Varney’s staff creates personalized plans for all native speakers of Spanish and other at-risk pupils. In eight years, with a rapidly changing and diverse study body, Dobson Elementary’s scores have risen from 70% proficiency to 90.3% today.

Varney says that state funding for English Language Learning (ELL) has not kept pace with the realities of North Carolina. Schools receive ELL funds based on numbers of “migrant” students. “For a long time it was migrants,” she says. “That’s not true anymore.” Only three new Mexican students have enrolled thus far this year. “The families that we have now have pretty much settled in,” Varney observes. “These people are here to stay.”



One indication of permanence is Divine Redentor (Divine Redeemer) Catholic Church, a large hacienda-style building just over the Yadkin County line, in Booneville. The Diocese of Charlotte had operated storefront churches for Spanish speakers in Dobson and Yadkinville for years, while the number of Latino (mainly Mexican) parishioners continued to grow. Divine Redeemer opened in February 2003. Deacon Harold Markle says 100 families have formally joined the church, though weekend services draw crowds of 1800–2000 people, from Surry and Yadkin Counties, Winston-Salem and Virginia.

As “the only predominantly Hispanic church in this area,” Divine Redeemer, Markle says, was dedicated to function as a cultural center as well as a house of worship. Outside the sanctuary, a stand holds flags from more than a dozen Spanish-speaking countries. In October, families began by turns taking home an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe to bless their houses, in preparation for the Mexican Virgin’s feast day—a major celebration—December 12.

With Surry County’s society and industries in flux, community leaders, in Mt. Airy especially, have been beset with a curious problem: how to maintain the town’s attractiveness as a stable, rural idyll yet adjust to a forcibly new economy.

“Tourism isn’t the answer but it’s one of the answers,” says Burke Robinson. After 25 years working in Raleigh, Atlanta and Charlotte, Robinson, a Mt. Airy native, moved his family back in 1991, to be closer to an aging parent and enroll his children in the smaller school district here. Robinson owns a chunk of Main Street, sells real estate, and is developing a resort on land just outside of town, where an elegant 19<sup>th</sup> century hotel once hosted guests from across the eastern seaboard.

He says that people hear about Mt. Airy “because it’s Mayberry. And then they’re blown away by the low cost of living.” Surry County is seeing an influx of “active retirees,” he says, people who can afford second homes in the area now and plan on moving to Surry County full time in the future. Northerners who may have retired to Florida, Robinson says, “are finding that summer twelve months a year is not much fun. They went from cold to hot, but they’re coming back to warm.”

Many of the newcomers are professionals from the northeast. Father Eric Kowalski, priest of Holy Angels Catholic Church in Mt. Airy, says that his congregation is now 40–50% “Yankees from up north.” Kowalski, himself a New Yorker, says that for outsiders, life in this small Southern town can be “in-

credibly oppressive....There’s a lot of ‘y’all ain’t from around here’ cliquishness.” In his 4 years at Holy Angels, Kowalski has seen that social tenor change. Two years ago, an ordinance to allow liquor by the drink came to a vote. Kowalski says the mere idea was “howled upon by many people,” who warned, “It will destroy our wholesome population.” The measure passed.

With tobacco on the decline, local vineyards and wineries are on the rise. Interest in this new cash crop was spurred by Charlie and Ed Shelton, local brothers who’d made their fortunes in North Carolina real estate development. In 1994 they bought 400 acres west of Dobson and five years later broke ground on a large winery and visitor’s center. The Sheltons also contributed to Surry Community College’s viticulture program, established in 2001 with money from Golden Leaf (the state’s proceeds from the settlement of claims against cigarette makers). The two-year program has already attracted some 50 students; many graduates have gone on to work in the area’s 17 wineries or started vineyards of their own.

Grape vines take seven to ten years to mature, so it’s too early to tell whether Yadkin Valley wines will succeed. Joanna Radford of the Extension Office says that most Surry tobacco farmers have been wary; she knows of only one who’s gotten into grapes. Marion Venable, director of the Surry Community College Foundation, notes that generally growers have not been local farmers; instead, “Investors are coming in from far off,” most recently from Venezuela. In contrast with the textile and furniture companies that had located in Surry County for its cheap water, timber and labor, Venable says, “The people we see coming in are attracted by aesthetics.”

This change more than any other seems to mirror what’s happening in Surry County. Burke Robinson points out that whether or not the local wines prove themselves, “The wine industry changes the perception” of the area. “It’s one of those feel good things.” As a local businessman, he adds, “The people who are attracted to the wine industry are the people I want, in their SUVs with the kayak on top and the bike on the back, not the people on the church bus who come to see the Andy Griffith statue and buy a Coke.”

Until very recently, Mt. Airy’s mill owners succeeded in restricting the size of the town via utility hookups, to hold out competition and keep wages low. Now that the textile companies are gone, the city has no buyers for a huge water supply. Mt. Airy is being forced to annex land and grow.

In hindsight, Burke Robinson says the textile companies’ stranglehold maintained the city’s old buildings and character, preventing its Mayberry myth from spawning another Dollywood. Likewise, he sees the upside of the textile mills’ demise: “If we hadn’t gotten tested, we would have gone into extinction.” Times have been tough, but Robinson believes “the future’s the best it’s been for fifty years”

If Surry County ever was a homogeneous, safe and simple place, that reality has been shellacked by thirty years of popular culture. Today’s Mayberry is a complicated, multi-cultural, changing place, wrestling both to keep its “quiet” and survive. The simple life has become “Simple Living,” a Mt. Airy-based media company with its own public television program, hosted by transplanted Californian, Wanda Urbanski,

For long-time residents, the collapse of Surry County’s traditional economies has brought trauma and, for some, insight. “If there’s any blessing in not having any work,” notes Dobson Elementary principal Jan Varney, “it’s seeing education as a necessity.” Anne Hennis, Dean of Research and Assessment at Surry Community College, says that after decades of assuming they’d find job in a sock factory or furniture plant, “There’s a new attitude among local young people. They’re more interested in self-employment,” Hennis observes. “They want to control their own destiny.”

Brent Hutchens, scheduled to earn his diploma by May, agrees. The factory closing that threw him out of work last year was cataclysmic, but had it not occurred, “I’d have been stuck working in a textile mill,” Hutchens says. “I feel like coming back to school has changed my life. I’ve learned who I am and my abilities, what I can do.”

*December 2005*

***Recreation, amenity and retirement counties are where the growth is.***

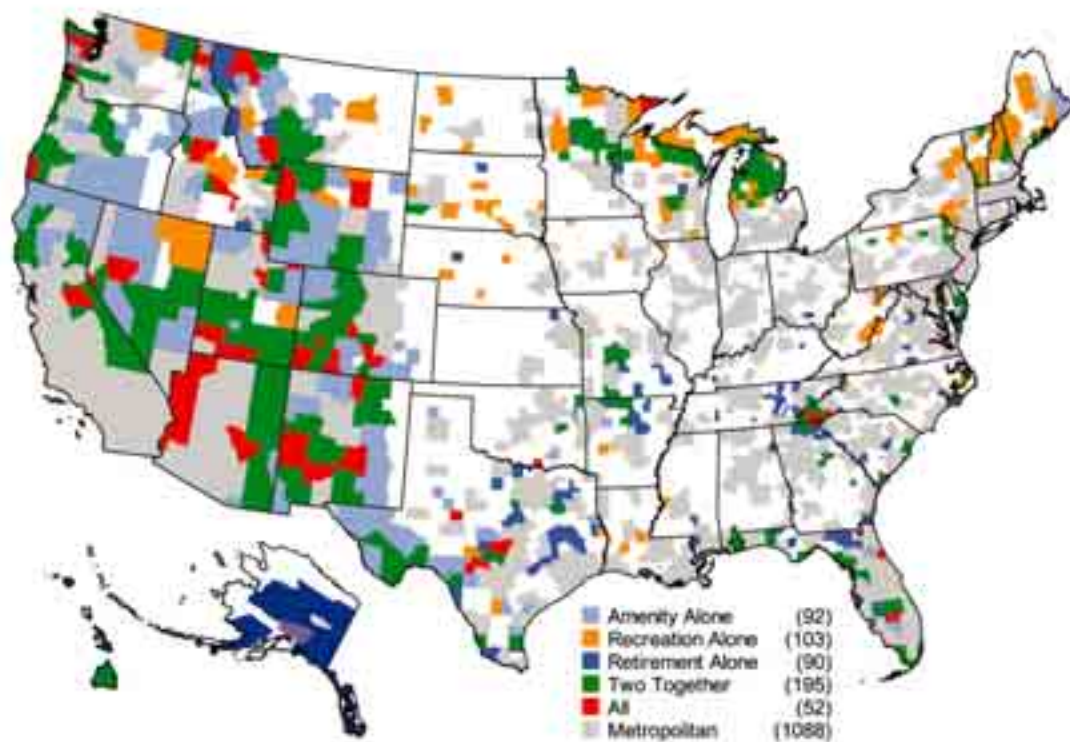
If farm and mining dependent counties represent the most traditional of rural counties, then areas with significant natural amenities, recreational opportunities or quality of life advantages represent the most contemporary group to emerge. Recreational getaways have long existed in rural areas, but only recently have they emerged as a significant force influencing demographic change. Researchers have used different methods to identify such areas. Johnson and Beale (2002) identify 300 “recreational” counties based on employment and earnings in recreational industries, concentrations of seasonal housing, high expenditures on hotels and motels together with contextual indicators of recreational activities. McGranahan (1999) uses a county-level index combining measures of climate, topography, and presence of bodies of water to identify “high natural amenity” counties. The Economic Research Service (2004) captures a distinct subset of amenity-based migration with its 227 “retirement destination” counties, defined as those that experienced at least a 15 percent gain in their over 60 population from migration between 1990–2000. It is no surprise that there is considerable

overlap among these three groups. Recreational activities are likely to be greatest in areas with significant natural amenities and such areas are likely to appeal to mobile retirees.

Major concentrations of these counties exist in the mountain and coastal regions of the West, in the upper Great Lakes, in coastal and scenic areas of New England and upstate New York, in the foothills of the Appalachians and Ozarks and in coastal regions from Virginia to Florida (Figure 13). Although these three county groupings differ in their details, they represent a new twist on long dominant patterns of rural residents exploiting their natural resources. Originally it was through extractive industries, but in contemporary rural America bountiful natural and recreational amenities offer new opportunities for growth and development.

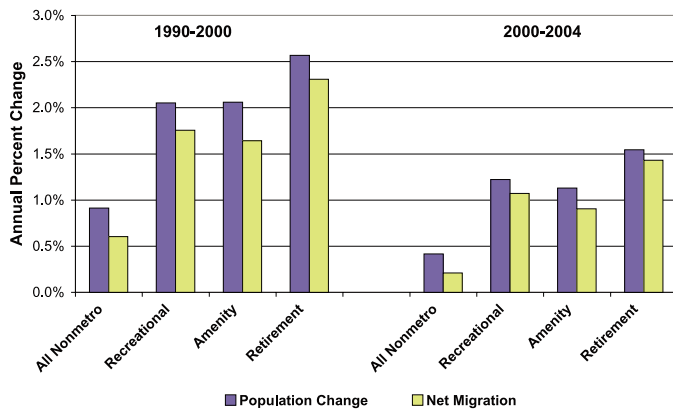
Recreation, amenity and retirement counties have consistently been the fastest growing counties in rural America through good times and bad. Such counties grew prominently during the 1970s, 1980s, and the 1990s and growth continued from 2000–2004, albeit at a reduced pace. Retirement counties grew by more than 2.6 percent annually between 1990 and 2000, with growth continuing after 2000 (Figure 14). Recreational and amenity counties grew at a slightly slower

FIGURE 13. RECREATION, AMENITY, AND RETIREMENT STATUS FOR NONMETROPOLITAN COUNTIES



Source: Beale and Johnson, 2002; McGranahan, 1999; USDA Economic Research Service, 2004.

FIGURE 14. DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE 1990-2004 FOR RECREATION, AMENITY, AND RETIREMENT COUNTIES



Source: Beale and Johnson, 2002; McGranahan, 1999; USDA Economic Research Service, 2004.

rate of 2.1 percent annually during the 1990s and even though this growth slowed after 2000, gains in such areas still far exceeded those in rural counties generally. Migration fueled virtually all the growth in each of these three types of counties.

### ***Migration to recreational areas brings jobs***

Those disengaging from the labor force are important contributors to rural growth in these appealing areas. Most retirees do not move, but if they do, they are attracted to places with attractive scenery and opportunities to engage in a variety of recreational venues. However, there is much more to growth in these areas than an inflow of retirement age migrants. Migration gains for adults in their 30s and 40s as well

as for their children are also quite large (Johnson et al., 2005). This underscores a point often overlooked in the discussion of such fast-growing counties. That is, an influx of retirees and amenity migrants creates jobs and opportunities for local residents as well. In essence, the area is able to retain more existing residents, which is also an important contributor to growth. If few people leave and many come, population gains can be quite substantial. For example, the building boom in recreational and retirement counties produces a demand for workers in the construction trades. Demand is also high for employees in the many retail and service establishments. So, people who grew up in the area and traditionally had to leave as young adults to find employment are now able to stay. In addition, such areas attract significant numbers of second homeowners. Some are older adults gradually disengaging from the labor force, but others are working-age people (consultants, contract employees, freelancers) for whom new communications technologies and changes in the organization of work allow more flexibility in choice of place of work. Over time, many second homeowners spend more time at second homes and many eventually retire to the area. In the meantime, part-time residents make significant contributions to the local economy (Johnson and Stewart, 2005).

### ***Baby boomers will flock to recreational counties***

An important recent development with significant long term demographic implications is an accelerating rate of migration to recreational areas among those in their 50s and 60s (Johnson et al., 2005). This represents a sharp contrast to the

## **A GREAT LAKES JEWEL RETAINS ITS LUSTER**

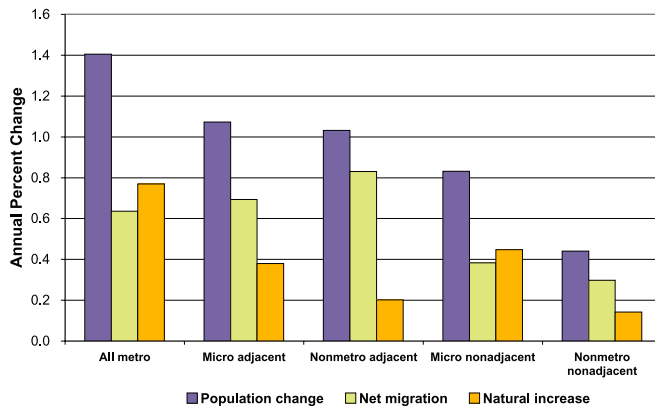
Michigan's Grand Traverse County exemplifies the substantial growth occurring in counties identified as recreational and retirement areas. Situated on a beautiful Lake Michigan bay in Michigan's Lower Peninsula, the county is well known for its crystal clear lakes, ski slopes, golf courses, restaurants, and lodging. It has a well-earned reputation as a year-round recreational center, but its economy is actually quite diverse. The county seat, Traverse City, is the hub of the micropolitan area and serves as a major commercial, retail, and health center for a multi-county area. The county also has a significant manufacturing base and agriculture remains important as well with more than 20 percent of the land in farms. The proximity to Lake Michigan makes the area well suited to the production of cherry and other orchard crops, though many cherry orchards are now being chopped down and converted to vineyards.

Grand Traverse has attracted both retirees and those seeking a temporary respite from the hectic pace of urban life. The result has been rapid population increase. The population grew from 39,175 in 1970 to 64,273 in 1990, a 64 percent gain in just 20 years. Growth has continued since 1990 with a gain of over

13,000 (20.8 percent) by 2000. Most of the growth is from migration, with a substantial part of the flow from the metropolitan areas of southern Michigan and Chicago.

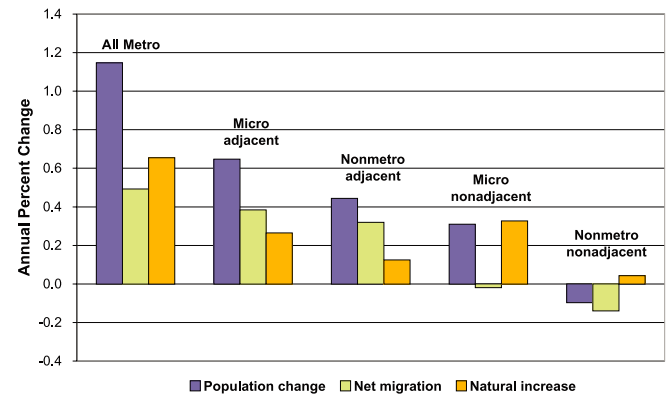
Many who previously vacationed in the area opted to move there after retiring. The presence of a substantial medical center, a regional airport offering multiple jets a day to Chicago and Detroit, ample shopping, an active nightlife and a variety of recreational opportunities makes the area attractive to retirees and amenity migrants ready to distance themselves from the metropolitan areas to the south, but not from the amenities they have come to expect. Growth has continued at a slightly slower pace since 2000 (6.6 percent). Such growth continues to increase employment opportunities, making it easier for residents to stay and for workers from surrounding areas to move in. But growth has had negative consequences as well. Some are concerned about the impact that so much growth will have on the environment and quality of life in the community, and traffic and congestion are now serious concerns in the once sleepy downtown area of Traverse City.

FIGURE 15. DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE, 1990-2000 BY AREA TYPE



Source: U.S. Census 1990-2000.

FIGURE 16. DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE, 2000-2004 BY AREA TYPE



Source: Census 2000 and FSCPE 2004.

relatively stable “migration signatures” of other county types. Elsewhere, the entire signature (which age groups grow the most and which groups lose the most migrants) might shift upward or downward to reflect changing amounts of migration from decade to decade (see Figure 5). Recreational counties are the only group to experience a change in the shape of the migration signature between 1950 and 2000 (Johnson et al., 2005). In this regard, migration rates for those over 50 have accelerated over the past several decades. This structural shift in migration patterns to recreational counties has significant implications because the ranks of those over the age of 50 are already beginning to swell with the first of 75 million baby boomers. If these large cohorts behave differently from the smaller older cohorts that preceded them, it would produce a “perfect storm” of migration fueling substantial future population gains in recreational and amenity counties. This would have significant policy implications because many of these

areas have already grown so much that they are experiencing considerable environmental and infrastructure stress (Johnson and Stewart, 2005; Johnson and Beale, 1998).

### Diversity in Metropolitan Proximity and Size of Place

The diversity of rural areas is also evident in settlement patterns. Though some rural residents live in the open countryside, most live in or near the many towns that are an important part of the rural landscape. In recognition of this, the Census Bureau has recently delineated what it refers to as “micropolitan” areas. Such county-based areas generally include at least one urban place of at least 10,000. Analysis now can be done on the influence of both metropolitan and micropolitan areas on population growth.

## LONG DISTANCE COMMUTING STABILIZES THE LOCAL POPULATION

Wolfe County, KY, was another rebound county of the 1990s, and the story of this place illustrates how an improved highway infrastructure allowing for long distance commuting has contributed to growth in rural America. Mountainous and thickly wooded, the county lies three counties away from Lexington, the nearest metro center. There is not even a micropolitan center nearby, so local employment opportunities are limited and the county has experienced persistently high poverty. The county’s population fell by 2.9 percent in the 1980s as coal-mining jobs in the area were lost to mechanization, but the county benefits from the four-lane Combs Mountain Parkway, which permits residents to work an hour away in Lexington or in an auto plant

located in yet another distant county. Wolfe County has also attracted a fair number of retirees; some returning after having made lives elsewhere, some leaving the rawer Appalachian hill country to the East.

In the 1990s, Wolfe County began growing again, with population up 8.6 percent through a combination of net migration and natural increase. Since the 2000 Census, Wolfe County has remained relatively stable, not gaining population but not losing much either (-0.3 percent since 2000). A slight net out migration (-1.3 percent) has been nearly balanced by low natural increase (1.0 percent).



## ESCAPING TO WISCONSIN

Walworth County, WI, is located about 70 miles northwest of Chicago's Loop and 40 miles southwest of downtown Milwaukee. Looking over the county's rolling hills and lakes, you'd never know that more than 10 million people live so close. This is a large county by rural standards with more than 98,000 residents in 2004. In addition to being adjacent to several large metropolitan areas, it is also one of the newly designated micropolitan counties. Nearly 1,000 farms occupy about 66 percent of the county's rich farmland. Industry is also important, employing a significant proportion of the local labor force. Tourism is the third major component of the local economy and the county is designated a recreational county. It has long served as a recreational getaway, first for Chicago's wealthy, who commuted by special train to their summer "cottages" along the shores of Lake Geneva, and later for the urban middle and working classes, who had cars and took advantage of better roads.

Unlike many rural counties, it has grown rapidly for decades, though the growth rate did slow during the downturn of the 1980s. The county grew by 25 percent during the rebound of the

1990s. Most of the growth is from net migration with the Chicago metropolitan area as the single largest source of migrants. Some are retired or semi-retired and have moved to vacation homes they have maintained for years. Others work on the periphery of the Chicago or Milwaukee metropolitan areas but prefer the slower pace and smaller communities of Walworth County.

Growth has continued since 2000, though the pace has slowed in Walworth County as it has in most other recreational counties. The population increased by 4.9 percent between 2000 and 2004. As in the past, most of the growth came from migration. And, with local entrepreneurs busy investing tens of millions of dollars on updating and expanding several large popular resorts to include indoor water parks and lavish suites, it is likely that more than a few folks from nearby Chicago might be enticed to "Escape to Wisconsin" for a weekend or a lifetime. With a diversified economy, urban proximity and a scenic location, the primary concern of many local residents and officials is how to handle all the growth.

### ***Metropolitan areas drive growth***

Rural counties near metropolitan areas have traditionally been much more likely to experience growth than more remote counties. In part, this occurs when proximate metropolitan areas sprawl outward and population eventually spills over the metropolitan boundaries into surrounding rural areas. In addition, many people view rural counties adjacent to metropolitan areas to be an excellent compromise between rural and urban life. Opinion polls consistently show a preference among many Americans to live in smaller places that are proximate to urban areas, rather than in the urban core (Brown et al., 1997). Counties adjacent to metropolitan areas are close enough to these areas to give people access to the urban labor market, amenities, and services, yet distant enough so that people can also enjoy the advantages of life in a smaller place. Many businesses also see advantages to locating in such areas because of lower land costs, less congestion and access to a high quality labor force.

The advantages of metropolitan proximity and size of place are certainly reflected in the data for both the 1990s and post 2000 period. Population growth rates in both periods were higher for those counties that were adjacent to metropolitan areas. Migration fueled most of this growth during the 1990s, with migration gains in adjacent areas actually exceeding those in metropolitan areas (Figure 15). Migration gains in adjacent counties slowed after 2000, resulting in smaller population gains (Figure 16). Although there are differences in the growth rates of adjacent counties depending on whether they contain a micropolitan center, the differences are quite

modest. Thus, the presence of a micropolitan center gives little added advantage when a metropolitan area is nearby.

### ***Micropolitan areas drive growth, too.***

An important finding from both the rural turnaround of the 1970s and the rebound of the 1990s was the discovery that growth was not limited to areas near metropolitan centers. Even among more remote rural counties, population gains were significantly greater than was historically the case. And the presence of a micropolitan center provides considerable advantage to a nonadjacent county. When no metropolitan center is nearby, counties including micropolitan centers are better able to retain population and attract new residents compared with more rural counties. During the 1990s, non-adjacent micropolitan areas had growth rates nearly as high as their adjacent counterparts, though natural increase contributed considerably more to their population gain than was the case in adjacent counties. Clearly, the slowdown in growth was much more pronounced in remote areas after 2000 (Figure 16). Non-adjacent counties that were not part of a micropolitan area had the smallest population gain of any type of county during the 1990s and the situation worsened after 2000, when out migration and population decline occurred.

## **Racial, Ethnic and Immigrant Diversity**

### ***Rural America is diverse and will become more so.***

Racial and ethnic diversity exists in rural areas as well. Historically rural America has been perceived to be overwhelmingly non-Hispanic white. This perception has considerable

FIGURE 17. NONMETROPOLITAN POPULATION BY RACE/ETHNICITY 2000

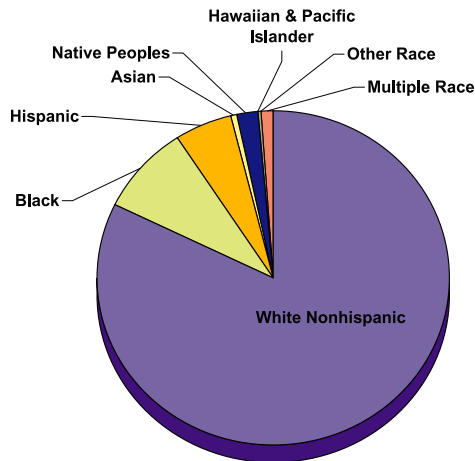
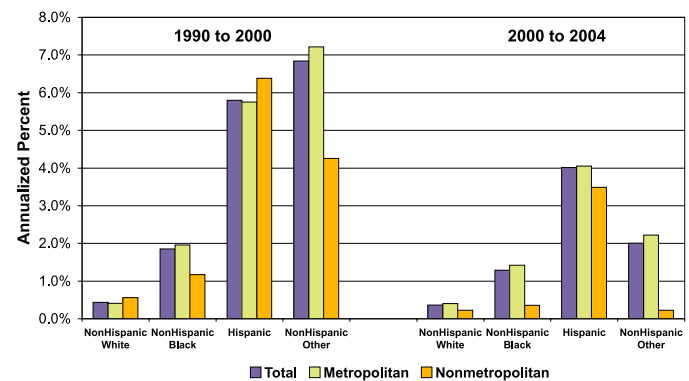


FIGURE 18. RATE OF POPULATION CHANGE BY RACE/ ETHNICITY 1990-2000 AND 2000-2004



Source: U.S. Census 1990-2000 and FSCPE 2004.

validity given that the proportion of the rural population that is non-Hispanic white (82 percent) is higher than in metropolitan areas (66 percent) (Figure 17). African Americans constitute the largest minority group in rural areas in 2000 at 8.4 percent. Hispanics constitute 5.4 percent of the rural population in 2000. This represents an interesting contrast to metropolitan areas, where Hispanics have overtaken African Americans to become the largest minority population. Native Americans constitute the largest share of the remaining 4 percent of the rural population.

Data on the rates of population growth among the various racial and ethnic groups in rural America suggest that diversity is likely to increase in the future. Non-Hispanic white growth rates are the lowest of any group and slowed precipitously between the 1990s and the post 2000 period (Figure 18). While greater than that for whites, the African American growth rate is also quite modest. In contrast, the Hispanic population in rural areas grew at the fastest rate of any racial or ethnic group during the 1990s, a pattern that has continued since 2000.

***The Hispanic population is growing fast while African-American and Native American populations are growing modestly.***

The rapid growth of the Hispanic population in rural areas is due, in part, to the relatively small proportion of the rural population they represent. However, the Hispanic population, which numbered only 1.6 million in 1990, grew by 1.4 million by 2004. This gain was much greater than that of the larger African American population (497,000) and that of other non-Hispanics (496,000). The non-Hispanic white population, which numbered 38.3 million in 1990, grew by 2.5 million during the 14-year period (Figure 18). Thus, the

Hispanic population gain is large in absolute as well as relative numbers. While Hispanics constituted only 3.6 percent of the rural population in 1990, they accounted for nearly 29 percent of the population gain between 1990 and 2004. Such growth is likely to continue because it results from substantial migration and a high rate of natural increase stimulated by the youth and high fertility of the Hispanic population. In contrast, both the African-American and Native American populations are growing primarily through natural increase. Future white population gains are even more precarious. They depend almost entirely on migration, because the considerably older white population has only limited potential to grow by natural increase. Thus, the rapid growth of the Hispanic population has the greatest potential to increase rural diversity in the future.

***There is considerable ethnic diversity across rural America, but local populations tend to be dominated by one or two groups.***

Rural areas are actually more ethnically diverse geographically than some of these data would suggest. To be sure, there are large areas of rural America that are overwhelmingly white (Figure 19). In part this is the legacy of past migration trends, which drew millions of people from rural areas and attracted almost all immigrants from 1900 onward to the nation's thriving metropolitan centers. Many left rural areas for the economic opportunities of the cities; others were pushed out by the diminishing demand for labor in agriculture and extractive industries. For African-Americans, the oppression and discrimination of the old south also stimulated out migration. Yet, despite the migration of millions of blacks to northern cities in the first two-thirds of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, very large African-American population concentrations remain

in the Southeast. In addition, the south to north migration of blacks ended by the 1970s. More blacks now move to the South than from it, although most black migration gains have accrued to urban areas of the South.

Hispanic population concentrations of long-standing in the Southwest remind us that they settled in these areas long before they became part of the United States. Such historical settlement patterns have been supplemented in recent years by a substantial influx of Hispanic immigrants (Kandel and Cromartie, 2004). Many of these immigrants initially migrated to the southwest but, as we shall see, immigrants have increasingly moved beyond these initial points of entry to become a significant presence in rural areas that have traditionally seen little diversity.

Though small in overall numbers, Native Americans represent an important element of many local communities, particularly in the northern Great Plains and in parts of the Southwest. Asian Americans are also present in a few rural areas including the Pacific Northwest and in a scattering of college communities across the Midwest and East.

One striking finding is the surprising small number of truly multi-ethnic counties in the U.S (Figure 19). In 2000, there were fewer than 160 counties in the entire country that had multi-ethnic populations (defined as having at least two minority groups exceeding their national percentage of the population). Most of these multi-ethnic communities are metropolitan. So, while some rural areas are becoming more racially diverse, in most one or possibly two racial/ethnic groups constitute the vast majority of the population.

***Immigrants are a new factor in rural population growth.***

An important emerging trend in the recent growth of rural America is immigration. Through most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century virtually all immigrants to the United States settled in urban areas. Immigrants were attracted to large metropolitan areas in the Southwest, to south Florida, to the Northeast metropolitan corridor, and to large metropolitan areas of the Midwest (i.e., Chicago, Detroit, etc.). Although some rural areas, particularly in the Southwest, have been receiving significant inflows of immigrants for some time, immigration to rural ar-

FIGURE 19. RACIAL AND ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF U.S. COUNTIES, 2000

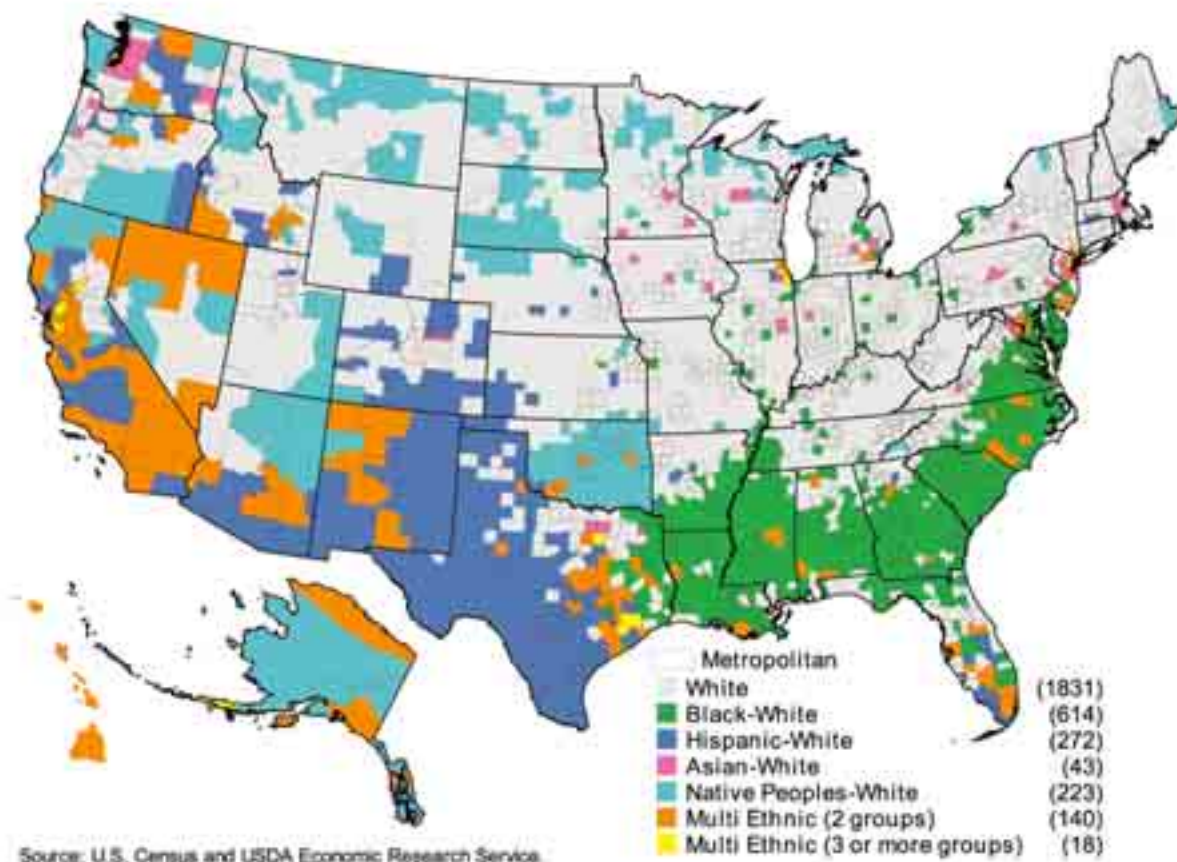
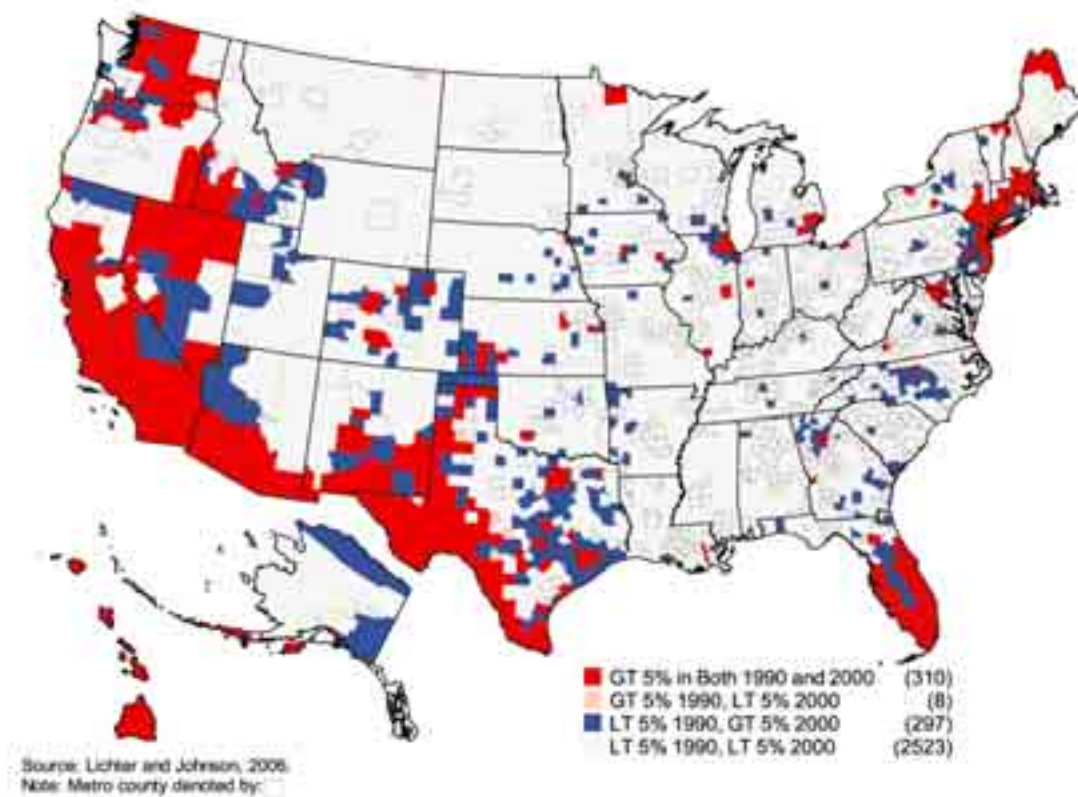


FIGURE 20. PERCENT FOREIGN BORN, 1990 AND 2000



has been relatively uncommon. Recent research (Lichter and Johnson, 2006) suggests immigration to rural areas is on the upswing and that the immigrants may be dispersing more widely. This is reflected in Figure 20 that illustrates the dispersion of the foreign born population outside the traditional gateway metro and border areas into rural areas. In some 297 counties, the foreign-born populations exceeded 5 percent for the first time in 2000 (the blue counties). Many of these counties are rural and cluster on the peripheries of existing regions with large concentrations of foreign-born (e.g., spreading out from the Southwest). There are also many isolated counties, especially in the rural Midwest, where the foreign-born population recently exceeded 5 percent. Central North Carolina and northern Georgia have also registered recent gains in the percentages of foreign-born population. Many of these counties are attracting Hispanics who work in meatpacking or food processing plants (Kandel and Cromartie 2004). Lichter and Johnson (2006) also find evidence suggesting that new immigrants—those who arrived in the past 5 years—may be bypassing the gateway cities and regions (or residing there only briefly) for more geographically dispersed locations.

The importance of immigration for rural areas stems more from the significance it holds for future growth than from its

absolute numbers. Immigrants remain a small proportion of the rural population, but immigration accounted for a disproportionate share of the rural growth between 1990 and 2000 (Lichter and Johnson, 2006). And, recent data suggests immigration continues to contribute disproportionately to rural growth since 2000. Between 2000 and 2004, immigration accounted for 62 percent of the rural migration gain and 31 percent of the overall population increase in rural areas. In many instances, the influx of immigrants offsets losses to the native born population in rural counties (Lichter and Johnson, 2006). Immigrants tend to be young, so they bring the vigor and energy of youth to rural communities that have lost much of their young adult population for decades. And many immigrants are in their childbearing years and tend to have higher fertility than native born, so they bring the potential for a new generation to many rural areas that are currently experiencing minimal natural increase or outright natural decrease. The importance of immigrants to many rural communities far outstrips their current modest numbers.



# Reasons for Recent Rural Demographic Trends

*Demographic changes reflect and amplify other social and economic forces.*

Trying to explain why demographic trends are changing is more difficult than documenting that they have changed. Rural America is a big place encompassing over 75 percent of the land area of the United States and 50 million people. Demographic changes in this vast area are far from monolithic and do not occur in a vacuum. They are a direct response to prior organizational, technological and environmental changes. Thus, globalization, economic restructuring, innovations in farming, and the diminishing friction of distance fostered by communications and transportation improvements all have implications for the demographic future of rural America.

Nor is demographic change merely a response to these forces. It is also causing future changes in the social, economic and political landscape of rural America. For example, the protracted outflow of young adults from so many rural counties diminishes the available human capital of the area, sapping the prospects for future economic development and reducing the resources available to staff the many social and civic organizations that form the social fabric of communities (Johnson and Fuguitt, 2000; Johnson et al., 2005; Johnson and Cromartie, 2006).

## ***Selective deconcentration.***

No simple explanation accounts for the rural demographic trends of the last several decades. Initial suggestions that the rural turnaround represented a “clean break” from historical trends (Vining and Strauss, 1977; Long and Nucci, 1997) seem less valid given recent oscillations in rural demographic trends. Nor do arguments that the turnaround was nothing more than a short-term deviation from the long-term trend toward rural loss seem compelling given that the protracted and unrelenting outmigration from rural areas ended in the 1970s. The most plausible explanation for recent U.S. demographic trends is that a “selective deconcentration” of the population is underway. Selective deconcentration describes the spatial unevenness of rural population growth. In essence, it suggests an overall tendency toward population deconcentration, but recognizes that this deconcentration is likely to be spatially and temporally uneven (Frey and Johnson, 1998; Johnson and Cromartie, 2006). The tendency of the U.S. population to spread out is tempered by economic, geographic and social factors.

Recent research suggests that selective deconcentration may

be best represented as a movement toward centers of moderate size and density, whether in metropolitan or rural areas. Population and migration gains over the last several decades have been greatest in the fringes of metropolitan areas, in rural areas that are proximate to metropolitan areas and in most rural counties that include micropolitan centers. In contrast, population and migration gains have been smallest in the heavily populated core counties of large metropolitan areas and in the most remote and thinly populated rural areas (Johnson, Nucci and Long, 2006; Johnson and Cromartie, 2006).

Any county may be an exception to the general tendency toward deconcentration. For example, many rural areas still dependent on extractive industries continue to lose population, as they have for decades. Recently, rural manufacturing counties have experienced outmigration as well because globalization stimulates the outsourcing of the low wage-low skill manufacturing jobs common in nonmetropolitan areas. Other areas with similar histories are now growing as centers of recreation or retirement (Johnson and Beale, 2002; McGranahan, 1999).

## ***Economic, technological and social forces fuel selective deconcentration.***

Several forces fuel the selective deconcentration now underway. Technological innovations in communications and transportation have been particularly important in giving people and businesses more flexibility to locate in more areas. Decades of federal, state and private investment in infrastructure such as the interstate highway system, expanded telecommunications and data transmission capacity, and the internet dramatically reduced the “friction of distance” that had long limited businesses, institutions and people to locations near metropolitan centers. At the same time, the economies of scale and geographic proximity that had long provided a significant competitive advantage to locating in an urban core have been eroded by congestion, high housing costs and densities, land shortages and high labor costs. As a result, we see the expansion of metropolitan areas and growth beyond the metropolitan fringe into increasingly accessible rural areas. Businesses now have more opportunities to select rural locations and enjoy their perceived advantages: lower labor and land costs, less unionization, access to an underutilized labor force, lower housing costs and a more relaxed lifestyle

likely to attract and retain employees. The reduced friction of distance also encourages households to consider migrating to or remaining outside the urban fringe where land is plentiful and less expensive, density is lower, and access to jobs, retailing and services is less constrained than it had historically been. Recently, however, some of these rural business advantages have been eroded by globalization, as findings for manufacturing counties illustrated.

### ***The idyllic rural life***

Important as economic and technological forces are, opinions polls continue to suggest a real preference among many Americans for small town life (Brown et al., 1997). The desire to retreat from big city stresses and hazards, the desire to live in a community where one can be known and make a difference, and a safer environment for raising children and a desire to be closer to nature all have contributed to the appeal of rural areas, especially those that are either within the sphere of nearby metropolitan areas or that have a micropolitan center of their own.

The outward sprawl of metropolitan areas clearly reflects this preference because it diminishes the population in the densely settled urban cores and simultaneously fuels population growth in the less densely settled metropolitan fringe and beyond (Johnson, Nucci and Long, 2006). The “spillover” of this population into adjacent rural areas is another example of selective deconcentration. The impact of “non-economic preferences” is also clear in the growth of recreational, retirement and high amenity areas. Thus, Sunbelt regions with their warmer climates, wealth of landscape amenities and economically booming metropolitan areas are better able to attract retirees and other “footloose populations” and create jobs that attract the working age population (Johnson and Cromartie, 2006).

### ***Rural America’s population trends are also driven by national policy.***

Rural America has witnessed a remarkable range of demographic changes recently. And, with migration now the dominant force influencing population redistribution, the future is likely to bring even more change. Rural America is also a diverse place. Future demographic trends will depend, in part, on the economic, geographic and racial/ethnic characteristics of each local community. However, there are larger forces at work as well. Rural America’s demographic future, like its past, is closely intertwined with the social, economic and political changes underway in the nation and world. One way such national and global forces manifest themselves in impacting rural communities is through government policy, a topic we consider next.

# Rural Demographic Trends and Policy

## *They're not all farmers*

What are the policy implications of recent rural demographic trends? First and foremost, policy developed to address the needs of rural America must be cognizant of its demographic, social, economic, geographic and racial/ethnic diversity. Rural America is not monolithic, so no single policy will address all the challenges facing it. In particular, there is much more to rural America than agriculture. So, it would be naive to suggest the needs of rural America could be addressed by farm policy alone, as important as that is.

Agricultural subsidies are currently the single largest governmental support that goes to rural areas and congressional delegations from farm states put enormous energy into maintaining them. However, the idea that agriculture is the economic engine for rural America serves as a major barrier to exploring alternatives that may be equally vital (Freshwater, 1997; Johnson and Rathge, 2006). Addressing the challenges of rural America requires comprehensive, multi-faceted policy initiatives sensitive to the complexity and diversity of the rural America portrayed in this report.

## *Rural is different*

A second critical point is that rural constituencies deserve to be included in many policy discussions from which they are currently marginalized. Rural interests certainly exercise

considerable clout in the development and passage of farm related legislation, but they do not fare as well on other relevant policy issues. In each year between 1994 and 2001, the federal government spent two to five times more money per capita on urban than rural community development (Rathge and Johnson, 2005). Rural areas also received only one third as much federal money for community resources as did urban areas.

Investment is critical to facilitate growth in thriving rural areas and cushion the effects of population loss in other communities. Poverty, health care, housing, sprawl and environmental protection policies all could benefit from the rural perspective. Rural needs often differ and initiatives that work well in urban areas may not be appropriate for rural areas. We turn now to several examples to illustrate this point.

## *Isolation makes rural poverty different*

When policy-makers address issues of child poverty, the focus is almost exclusively on the problems of poor urban children. Yet, rural child poverty rates are higher than for urban children of every racial and ethnic group and the highest poverty rates are in the most rural places (O'Hare and Johnson, 2004). In all, 48 of the 50 counties with the highest child poverty rates in America are rural, and the gap between urban and rural child poverty has widened since the late 1990s. Furthermore, programs designed to address the needs of the urban poor may

## THE NEW HOMESTEAD ACT

The New Homestead Act (S 675) sponsored by Senators Byron Dorgan (D-ND), Chuck Hegel (D-SD), Tim Johnson (D-SD) and Sam Brownback (R-KS) exemplifies the kind of comprehensive legislation that might address the complex needs of rural areas. The legislation targets nonmetropolitan counties that have lost more than 10 percent of their population by out migration during the past 20 years. Some 698 counties currently qualify for the program. Qualifying counties are scattered over much of the country, but many are in the Great Plains and the Corn Belt. The goal of the legislation is to stem the outflow of population from nonmetropolitan counties. The sponsors recognize that it won't save every struggling rural county, but it may give many that are marginal the boost they need to survive and prosper.

The Act is modeled on the original Homestead Act of 1862, which offered government land to anyone willing to settle on and

work it for five years. The New Homestead Act offers incentives to individuals and businesses to encourage them to stay in or move to counties with histories of out migration. For individuals, incentives include repayment of college loans, tax credits for home purchases, protection of home values and tax-free accounts to build savings and increase access to credit. For businesses, incentives include investment tax credits, micro-enterprise tax credits and a venture capital fund. The New Homestead Act is a comprehensive bill seeking to address many of the problems causing population loss and out migration from hundreds of rural communities. Such multi-facet policy initiatives are needed to address the complex factors that stimulated out migration. Whether it will be passed into law and whether it can, in fact, slow or reverse the out migration from many rural communities remains to be seen.

not adequately address the problems faced by the rural poor. In particular, the physical and social isolation associated with rural poverty creates problems different from those in densely settled urban areas. Due to a lack of transportation and the considerable distances to be traveled, the rural poor often lack access to government services and the help they need to navigate the intricacies of the social services system. And in many rural areas there is a stronger social stigma attached to participating in social and welfare programs because the culture places a high value on self-reliance. This may discourage participation in available programs and reduce access to informal help in working through the welfare bureaucracy. At a more fundamental level, welfare reform may be dominated by an urban image of poverty that portrays those on welfare as unwed parents with children who are either unable or unwilling to work. In rural areas, a significantly higher proportion of poor families include adults who are both married and working, but unable to make enough to lift their families out of poverty. In essence they are already “playing by the rules.” Thus, programs to get those who are poor back into the labor force are unlikely to have the same impact in rural areas as in urban areas. These issues need to be considered before implementing policies and programs designed primarily for urban poor populations (O’Hare and Johnson, 2004).

#### ***Problems in accessing health care are exacerbated in rural areas***

Rural interests also deserve more input to health care policy. While issues of access to quality health care are relevant in both urban and rural areas, there are important differences in the two arenas. In urban areas, questions of access to care often revolve around whether all segments of the population have access to the full range of specialized medical centers serving the metropolitan area. In rural areas, the issue is often whether there are any health care facilities and providers to access at all. Large metropolitan counties have nearly four times as many physicians per 100,000 residents as do rural counties with only small towns. Access to specialized medical care in rural areas is even more problematic. Small rural counties have only one-sixth as many specialists per 100,000 residents as do large metropolitan areas. The relative dearth of health care professionals and hospitals in rural areas is exacerbated by the distances rural residents often have to travel to get to them. The consequences can be particularly dire when time is critical, as with accidents involving severe trauma or life threatening illnesses. The higher fatality rates in rural areas for infants, young adults, middle aged adults and victims of motor vehicle accidents is a sober reminder that where you live sometimes determines whether you live (National Center for Health Statistics, 2001). Thus, access to care means differ-

ent things in rural and urban areas and policy makers must be cognizant of these differences.

#### ***Rural areas are challenged by sprawl and growth***

Discussions of population deconcentration, often characterized as urban sprawl have significance to rural as well as metropolitan areas. Yet, most current discussion of sprawl is dominated by city and suburban interests maneuvering to protect turf and access to resources. For rural communities, sprawl has somewhat different implications requiring different programs and initiatives. Coping with a rapid influx of people and businesses represents a serious challenge that many rural governments are not fully prepared to meet. Trying to manage such growth exemplifies the complex challenges rural governments face. A population surge accelerates the demand for new schools, roads, sewers, emergency services, and the myriad of other things required to support a growing population. Yet the substantial upfront cost of improvements often exceeds the short-term revenue gains they provide. When this is combined with declines in intergovernmental revenues due to devolution, many rural governments face serious risks of fiscal stress (Johnson et al., 1995).

#### ***Rural communities need growth management***

Development pressures also require local governments to implement complex growth-management strategies. If properly executed, growth policies can prepare communities to deal with large-scale development by extending water and sewer lines, annexing large tracts of land in anticipation of residential and commercial development and implementing development impact fees to cover the cost of such infrastructure improvements.

Development sometimes fosters competition among rural taxing districts as they vie with one another for new homes and commercial areas that will enhance their tax base. Without a comprehensive development strategy and a regional consensus about how to implement it, opportunistic developers may play local governments off against one another to get what they want.

If growth is to be managed, local governments need the staff, training, legal framework and resources to produce and enforce plans that allow growth, but protect the environment, public access, open space and farmland. However, rural local governments already stretched thin by the demands of a growing population and, short of revenue and expertise, are hard pressed to develop such elaborate, multi-dimensional growth strategies. The need for rural governments to cooperate at a regional level often is at odds with the local independence that characterizes many rural communities. The special needs associated with rural growth must be considered in



developing national and regional growth plans. Any serious discussion of sprawl must recognize rural governments, communities and organizations as viable partners in the policy-making process.

### ***Rural communities need help in environmental management***

Selective population deconcentration has significant environmental implications as well. In agricultural areas near sprawling metropolitan centers, development can consume thousands of acres of prime farmland at an alarming rate, quickly making farmers a dwindling minority despite their centrality to the character and appeal of the area. In addition to taking prime land out of production, development can fragment the remaining agricultural land making it difficult for farmers to operate efficiently. For example, moving equipment from field to field becomes increasingly problematic as urban migrants come to dominate local traffic flows. Development also pushes up land prices making it difficult for new farmers to get started and for older farmers to pass on their farm to the next generation. In some agricultural areas, family farms are being replaced by large-scale meat, poultry and dairy processors who create jobs but generate enormous amounts of concentrated wastes, producing serious environmental hazards and clashing with encroaching housing developments.

### ***Recreational areas face special problems***

Rural areas endowed with natural resources including lakes, rivers, forests and scenic views face serious environmental concerns as well. Continuing growth in such recreational and natural amenity areas is particularly significant because they contain many environmentally sensitive areas. Population growth increases the population density along the forest edge, puts additional pressure on riparian and environmentally sensitive areas, increases use of recreational facilities and complicates forest management and fire suppression (Radeloff et al., 2001; Wear and Bolstad, 1998; Wear, et.al., 1998). Recreational areas face unique governmental problems as well because of the seasonal variability in their population. Often their service delivery systems and infrastructure must be designed to meet seasonal peak demands that are well above the capacity required for most of the year. This has significant fiscal implications.

## **Involving rural constituencies is critical for the nation**

The topics noted above illustrate the importance of having active input from rural constituencies in developing policy. They also underscore the linkages between demographic change in nonmetropolitan areas and policy. Some rural areas need additional funding and policies to help them manage the rapid population gains they are experiencing because of urban sprawl or the appealing amenities they offer. Other rural communities need help to cushion the impact of continued population loss. However, the topics covered here merely scratch the surface of the host of issues that have significant implications for rural communities. Other critical topics include education, clean drinking water, transportation, energy, government service availability and access to the Internet. While all these topics are relevant to urban as well as rural areas, the policy implications may well differ. Comprehensive policies fully cognizant of the special needs of rural communities may serve to mitigate the social, economic and physical isolation that remains a problem in many rural communities and limits their opportunities to become fully integrated into the national mainstream. Improving the opportunities, accessibility and viability of rural areas is critical for creating a sustainable future for the 50 million rural people and the communities and institutions that are a critical element of the social, political and economic fabric of the nation.

# Data and Methods

Counties are the unit of analysis in this study because historically they have stable boundaries and are a basic unit for reporting fertility, mortality, and census data. Counties are also appropriate units of analysis because metropolitan and micropolitan areas are built up from them (county-equivalents are used for New England)<sup>3</sup>. Counties are designated as metropolitan, micropolitan or nonmetropolitan using criteria developed by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget. A metropolitan area is a county containing one or more urbanized areas (generally a city) with a combined population of at least 50,000, and any other counties economically and socially linked to the central city/county. A micropolitan area is a county containing an urban place of at least 10,000 and other counties linked to it. Commuting patterns are the basis for determining which counties should be linked to the county containing the urban center. Micropolitan counties are classified here as a subset of the nonmetropolitan counties. In 2003, there were 1,089 metropolitan counties and 2,051 nonmetropolitan counties. This report is based on analysis of these 2,051 nonmetropolitan counties. We use the words “nonmetropolitan” and “rural” interchangeably, as we do the terms urban and metropolitan.

Efforts to examine nonmetropolitan demographic trends longitudinally are complicated by metropolitan expansion. Such expansion occurs through two distinct processes. First, nonmetropolitan counties may be added to existing metropolitan areas; and second, entirely new metropolitan areas may be created from previously nonmetropolitan territory. Census Bureau researchers Larry Long and Alfred Nucci report that between 1963 and 1993, 412 nonmetropolitan counties containing 15.2 percent of the U.S. population were reclassified as metropolitan. The 2003 reclassification added a net of 252 additional counties to the metropolitan category. These counties contained an additional 7.2 million residents in 2000 or 2.6 percent of the U.S. total. Ironically, many of the rural counties exhibiting prolific growth eventually lose their rural status because they are annexed to existing metropolitan areas or form the nucleus of entirely new metropolitan areas. Thus, in considering the nonmetropolitan demographic trends of the past 34 years, bear in mind that rural growth has occurred in spite of the loss of many dynamic counties to metropolitan areas.

Population data for each county come from the decennial census of population and from the Federal-State Cooperative Population Estimates program (FSCPE). The FSCPE program estimates the population on an annual basis as of July 1<sup>st</sup>. This report uses the most recent estimates available through July 1, 2004. The estimates of net migration used here were derived by the residual method whereby net migration is what is left when natural increase (births minus deaths) is subtracted from total population change. Net migration includes net international migration, net internal migration, and differences in coverage of the various censuses.

Historical data used in this report include population statistics from decennial censuses back to 1920 (Johnson, 1985; U.S. Census Bureau, 1978; U. S. Census Bureau, 1984; U.S. Census Bureau, 1992). Recently released age-specific net migration data for 1990 to 2000 (Johnson et al., 2005) combined with previous research following similar methodologies (Bowles & Tarver, 1965; Bowles et al., 1975; White, Mueser & Tierney, 1987; Fuguitt & Beale, 1993) provides a comprehensive picture of the age structure of rural migration since 1950.

County-level typologies developed by the Economic Research Service (ERS) are used to identify factors associated with rural population redistribution (Economic Research Service, 2004). The ERS typology has been supplemented with a natural amenity index developed by David McGranahan (1999) and with a recreational classification system developed by Johnson and Beale (2002).

To highlight geographical differences in the scale and timing of nonmetropolitan population change, states are divided into four regions—Northeast, Midwest, South, and West—a simple and widely-used Census Bureau scheme that allows for comparison with a long series of census publications and other research on rural demography (Frey & Speare, 1988; Fuguitt et al., 1989; Cromartie, 1993; Johnson and Cromartie, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Independent cities are combined with the counties surrounding them.

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